A HOSTAGE IN GERMANY

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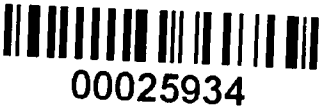
GEORGES DESSON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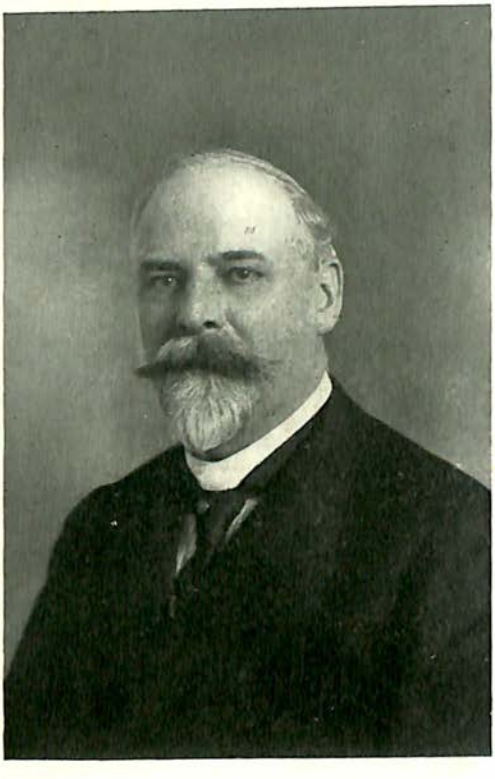

M. GEORGES DESSON

A HOSTAGE IN GERMANY

BY

GEORGES DESSON

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION BY

LEE HOLT

25934

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In translating this book, I have endeavoured to keep as closely as possible to M. Georges Desson's graphic and natural style. I feel convinced that the narrative, simple as it is, will interest, because it is true; its sincerity is manifest throughout. The book offers us a glimpse of the methods adopted by Germany, and the spirit which prevails there.

LEE HOLT.

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A HOSTAGE IN GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

THE first time I saw M. Georges Desson I was struck by his obvious sincerity. It was clear that those eyes, so candid and frank, saw things clearly and justly. With him no distortion or exaggeration of the truth was possible.

I had been to Zurich and had waited there in order to greet, in the name of the *Petit Parisien*, the ten prisoners whom Germany, in defiance of all right or justice, and employing her usual methods of intimidation and blackmail, had held in durance for eleven months.

During our journey from Zurich to Geneva I had many opportunities of talking to M. Georges Desson, and of hearing his praises sung by his companions in misfortune, M. Noël, Senator for the Aisne, M. Trépont, Prefect of the North, M. Jacomet, Attorney-General at the Court of Douai, the Comte de Francqueville, and others.

They could not say enough of his courage, his patriotism, and his wonderful resourcefulness, and all they owed to him during their captivity. They also spoke most warmly of his invariable good temper, cheerfulness, and kindness of heart.

At the same time I learnt his history, or rather with a little help from him, I recalled it.

The name of Desson is not unknown to the public. Think of the great days of the automobile industry, the " George Bennett Cup," the " Circuit d'Auvergne," the " Grand Prix de Dieppe," the " Press Cup " in Normandy. The principal organiser of all these was M. L'Ingénieur Desson, delegate of the " Commissaire Générale " of the Automobile Club of France.

His great ability and his universal courtesy were so much appreciated, that at Lisieux (the scene of one of his greatest efforts) the municipality, at a special sitting, tendered him the freedom of the city.

The activity of the engineer showed itself in other fields. Called to the extreme East he was one of the creators of Port Arthur. The protection of the harbour and the fortification plans were in a large measure his work. Returning to France, and becoming associated with the " 4me Bureau de l'Etat major," he contributed

largely, by his collaboration with Colonel, now General, Gouagoux, the Commandant Ferrus, and Captain Enaux, in the introduction of motor lorries, into the Commissariat Department. The wonderful benefits of this innovation has been proved during the War.

Many would have considered such claims to distinction sufficient, but M. Georges Desson was not satisfied to rest on his laurels. He threw himself with renewed ardour into his former studies in electricity. In this field he had already gained celebrity before he devoted himself to the automobile industry. The introduction of rubber bands in the wheels of heavy vehicles, the discovery of new processes in the manufacture of steel are testimonies to his inventive genius, and have earned him the thanks of scientists. M. Georges Desson is undoubtedly in the first rank of contemporary engineers.

The importance of obtaining the recital of his experiences at first hand was undeniable.

I therefore entreated M. Georges Desson to collect his notes describing his eleven months of captivity.

It was some time before I could obtain a promise from him to do so. His usual clear reasoning enabled him to see all the interest of such a work. But he had certain scruples.

"If he related all he had seen, would it not draw down upon the districts still invaded an increase of burdens and cruelties. The malice of the invader was such that he might eagerly seize on a publication of this kind as an arm with which to revenge himself on the unfortunates still in his charge."

These scruples, so honourable and so French, would most certainly have prevented M. Desson from publishing these interesting souvenirs, had not his friends put the matter before him in another light, representing to him that the very situation and the sufferings of his compatriots still imprisoned, demanded that certain facts should be generally known. They told him it was just from documents like his that the true history of the German outrages would eventually be compiled. That before the coming day, when wrongs would be righted, his and other testimonies of a similar nature would have to be collected, examined, sorted and sifted, in order to arrive at the exact truth. In working to eliminate the truth from the mass of Teutonic falsehood, M. Desson would contribute his part, if only a modest one, towards the restoration of right, and the resurrection of Justice. More, in giving descriptions of the country through which he passed, of the people still free, or the

prisoners whom he happened to see, he might bring consolation and comfort to families now suffering under the anguish of doubt. How could he hesitate ?

So M. Desson decided to relate the principal incidents of his eleven months of captivity. As from day to day I followed the course of the narrative, and still deeper into the character of the writer, my esteem grew. His good humour, his high principles, and his gay courage revealed themselves continually in his story. His constant wish to tell the exact truth, and nothing but the truth also forcibly struck me. M. Desson presents a great contrast to those witnesses who arrange their facts with a view to the gallery. It never occurs to him to write other than simply and straightforwardly. If ever there was a publication to which one could apply Montaigne's well known words, " This is a Book written in good faith," it is certainly this short history. M. Desson wrote as he saw (and certainly he had an eye to the picturesque) and as he felt, but of things which he judged might provoke, what German perfidy describes as reprisals, and draw new persecutions on the invaded countries he has remained discreetly silent.

SERGE BASSET.

CHAPTER I

I HAVE been led to write this short account of my eleven months of captivity, not from any reason of vanity, but simply to add my modest contribution to the history, which is slowly being gathered together, of the German occupation, and at the same time to testify with sincere admiration to the wonderful courage and patriotism of my companions.

Long before that fatal month of July, 1914, I had felt convinced, from many indications, that war would soon be let loose upon us, but never, even on the day of the order for mobilisation, could I have imagined the sutprising adventures Fate had in store for me.

I had intended passing my holidays, as in former years, at St. Jean de Luz, and on the First of August, while I was lunching at home, I was wondering whether the state of affairs existing would permit of my going so far.

A telegram was brought in from my daughter, Madame Jean Marie Desson, who was living at Tergnier in the Aisne. She and my son-in-law

were managing the Grand Hotel Jean Marie, very well known by travellers in that district.

The telegram read as follows :

" My husband mobilised leaves for Charleville am all alone to manage hotel Come immediately."

A train left for Tergnier every evening at 6.20. " We will take that," I said to my wife. Easier said than done ! When the taxi which was taking us to the Gare du Nord reached the Rue de Chateaudun and the Rue Lafayette, we found an enormous and excited crowd. The streets were almost impassable, and I saw at once we should never reach the station in our taxi, but that by myself I might on foot still be able to make my way there. I therefore left Madame Desson, promising to return home soon and fetch her.

With great difficulty I succeeded in reaching the station. Fortunately I knew the place well, and by taking short cuts arrived on the platform as the whistle sounded. The train was already in motion as I jumped on to a car.

What an extraordinary sight that train was ! Packed with travellers, chiefly foreigners (how many of these were spies, and suspects who ought to have been sent at once to a concentration camp who can tell ?) all victims to anxiety and even despair, packed tightly in the carriages,

some even perched on the steps outside. During this journey I saw some very singular things.

The train was not late, and I arrived at Tergnier very nearly on time. At the Hotel Jean Marie I found my daughter struggling to cater for the sudden rush of excited travellers. I worked all night helping her, as the hotel was besieged by a steady stream of passengers.

For several days this stream, both at the hotel and in the surrounding country, continued to flow, and from morning to night my daughter and I, with the small staff remaining, worked hard, though the bad news we continually heard on all sides wrung our hearts. Gloomy tidings came constantly, indeed, with every fresh arrival. First the entry of the Germans into Belgium, then their atrocities, news of the fall of Liége, of Louvain, and soon after the siege of Maubeuge.

A veritable gale of panic swept over the country. Even the police at Tergnier were so disorganised by the mobilisation that M. Cormoran (I met him later a prisoner at Celle), who was then Commissaire, begged me with several other well-known men, to form a company to secure the public safety, to watch at night over houses and property.

" Good," said I, " Here am I a *sergot.*"

When I thought of the immense warehouses

at Tergnier which contained millions of francs' worth of merchandise (corn, sugar, oil cake, and provisions) I was exceedingly uneasy. The Germans were said to be approaching. Were the authorities going to allow this precious stuff to fall into the hands of the enemy? Well, it chanced that there were a number of locomotives which had been sent from Belgium in the station at Tergnier, which was occupied by the military authorities. The obvious thing was to load up this formidable stock of merchandise, hook on the engines, and send it further into France. The destination could be decided later.

Several times, I pressed this suggestion on the officers who were in command at the station.

"You are perfectly right," they invariably replied, "but we have no orders."

Just for this lack of orders the Germans came into a most unexpected windfall!

It was towards the end of August that the emigrants from Maubeuge began to arrive. The saddest of sights was this troop of human beings fleeing before invasion. The poor creatures walked in a stupor, dumb and hopeless. Their misery was indescribable. To see them sleeping in the streets, or begging for a little food, would have touched the hardest heart. And what sorrows, we asked ourselves, awaited us to-

morrow? What measure of calamity was to fall on our country?

On the 25th of August, at 5 o'clock in the morning, I heard some one knocking at the hotel door. I hurried down to find a touching picture before me.

Madame D——, her five little girls and her mother-in-law had come to beg me to help them to leave the country. The D——s are old and excellent friends. I am exceedingly attached to them. They have lived for many years in this neighbourhood and the family is well known, loved and respected. Madame D—— and her father and mother, M. and Madame O——, live at the Château —— in the parish of R—M—D. Their son-in-law (mobilised on the first day) is one of the mayors of the district, and for some years I have been consulting engineer to an important sugar factory owned by the family.

You can imagine how I felt when I saw Madame D——, surrounded by her children, her mother and servants, all terrified, standing before our door at this early hour. Madame D—— was crying.

"What is the matter?" I asked her.

Hardly able to speak for sobs, she explained that, on hearing the terrifying rumours of the coming invasion by the Germans and the repu-

tation they had gained, owing to the horrors they had committed in Belgium, the father and mother of Madame D——, M. and Madame O——, had insisted on their daughter leaving for Paris. They themselves being too old, they said, to leave, would await events. They would be satisfied if only their daughter and grandchildren were out of danger.

"I feel for my children's sake I ought to leave," said the poor woman to me between her sobs, "but to leave my father and mother. . . . I cannot live."

M. and Madame O—— were right. Before all we must save the young, the hope of the future, the harvest of to-morrow. I reassured Madame D——. I told her that I would watch over her parents but that she and the children must start, and that as soon as possible for Paris.

Yes, but how?

I ran to the station.

"Too late," declared the Military Commandant. "I have been advised that no more trains will be sent us."

"Well! Make one up here. You don't lack either engines or carriages."

The Commandant hesitated.

"I can't, I have no orders."

Always this exasperating reply, "I have no

orders." What about personal initiative ? Should the individual have no initiative ?

On the platform crowds of emigrants were waiting, hoping (for what the poor things did not know themselves). There they were, lying, sitting and standing about. It was a pitiful spectacle and one that became every minute more painful. I pointed it out to the Commandant.

" You are not going to abandon these poor creatures. What will become of them ? "

I insisted again urgently. I represented to him that it was morally impossible (given that he and his staff were preparing to go) for them to leave Tergnier without organising a last train for the emigrants. I offered to pay for a special train, in case of any trouble with the Administration. Finally I succeeded in convincing him, and at seven o'clock in the morning I had the satisfaction of seeing the carriage in which I had comfortably installed Madame D——, her children, mother-in-law and servants, disappear in the distance.

It was the last train to leave Tergnier.

At the moment of parting Madame D—— had again burst into tears. " I implore you not to abandon my parents," she cried.

" Rely on me," I answered. " I shall go to-day to place myself at their service. Whatever

happens, as long as it rests with me, I will not leave them."

It was thus, having come to Tergnier on account of my daughter, I stayed on on account of my friends.

CHAPTER II

As soon as I got back to the hotel I announced my intention to my wife who had joined me some days previously, and then sent to M. and Madame O—— this short note by a servant :

" Madame D—— and her children have left. Send me a carriage in order that I can come to you and talk over the situation. Count on me."

It is hardly seven or eight kilometres from Tergnier to Rogécourt, in which parish is the Château du Montrouge.

Two hours later a carriage was in front of my door. After having promised my wife and children to return that same evening, in order to acquaint them with any decisions I might make, I started. M. and Madame O—— were waiting for me in despair. The departure of their daughter and their grandchildren, the separation, their fears for the future, the utter confusion in which the greater number of their servants had left them, all combined to render them terribly anxious and distressed. Greatly enfeebled already by illness and age, the rumours and panic flood-

ing the country had almost prostrated them. They embraced me with tears in their eyes.

"What shall we do? What will become of us?"

I loved them dearly, as I have already said, and I calmed them as best I could.

"We will talk things over," said I. "Whatever happens we are three now, and three people can do many things."

The situation was anything but reassuring for my friends. The Château du Montrouge is surrounded by two large farms and the sugar factory of Berteaucourt. The manager of the sugar factory had left, after disbanding the two hundred workmen who were normally employed there. In the two farms, the foremen who were mobilised had left but a meagre female staff, which dwindled daily under the influence of the bad news. M. and Madame O——, who had been surrounded by their workpeople only a month ago, now found themselves alone on this vast property, unable to defend themselves, abandoned by all, in the way of the advancing armies.

Ought they to leave the Château?

At the very idea their hearts failed them. Was it possible to say good-bye to all that had made the joy of their lives for so many years?

"If we leave what will become of everything?" they said trembling.

" You will not leave," I said resolutely. " If the Prussians arrive we will receive them. They will hardly eat us ! I am tall and strong, and in the mood to have a word or two with them."

" Then it is settled that we stay ? " they asked me, much moved.

" Certainly, we stay ! I shall return to Tergnier to persuade my children to go to Paris, then with my wife I shall return to-morrow and we will take up our quarters here."

A few minutes later I was on my way to Tergnier. " You leave to-morrow morning," I said to my children. " Make up parcels of all that you have of value and take them with you. You will go to my house in Paris and await our return, for of course your mother stays with me."

We passed the night in packing boxes and parcels. I buried in the cellar all there was of value which could not be taken away, and, as an engineer is always something of a stonemason, I walled in our treasures. Alas ! the betrayal by a maid delivered the secret to the Germans, who threw down the partitions and the hastily improvised walls and, amongst other robberies, pillaged my son's cellar. Such a cellar, too, with its wonderful cognacs and bottles of old chartreuse ! When I think that all this was drunk by Germans !

The next day, after watching the carriage disappear with our children, Madame Desson and I took up our abode at the Château du Montrouge. Well, if stirring events were to happen we were ready for them!

We had not long to wait. In the afternoon I had gone over to La Fère to fetch Madame B——, Madame O——'s mother, a charming and gentle old lady eighty years of age. On returning that evening I saw, in the bright moonlight, what looked like a flock of large birds on the plain. The sky was a marvellous clear blue, and the sight was magnificent. As I approached, I recognised them by their shape to be English aeroplanes. There were forty-two of them!

"Here is a guard of honour worth something," thought I. "To-night, anyhow, we can sleep quietly!"

Sleep! I could not sleep.

From the moment of my arrival that morning at the château, M. and Madame O—— had begged me to take their place and to act for them in everything. I became *Intendant Général;* I devoted myself entirely to this *rôle.*

I did my best to receive our Allies. A General was in command of this column of aviators, and with his officers he stayed at the château while I arranged for the rest to camp out.

The next day the great birds went off again, and the sound of their powerful propellers filled us with hope.

I noticed that the General was anxious. In reply to my questions, "Is it known where the Germans are? What is happening?" he answered little or nothing; but that very evening we were to have the answer, sudden, brutal and terrifying.

During that afternoon we had watched the English troops defile past. They took up their quarters about 1,500 metres from us, in a château called the Château de M—— L——, and which, like that of Montrouge, dominates the little valley from another point. The soldiers hastily fortified it, surrounding it with barbed wire and trenches. Silhouettes of cannon appeared at intervals round the château. It was evident that our Allies were establishing a blockhouse, and the sight filled us partly with confidence and partly with apprehension.

"The Germans can come now!" said I jokingly to M. and Madame O——. "We have something to receive them with."

CHAPTER III

A RASH boast! We were rudely disillusioned that very evening. Towards ten o'clock, just as I was going to bed, two officers made their appearance very much agitated.

"M. Desson," they said, "you must leave the château this evening. The Germans are approaching. You will find yourself taken between two fires. Leave without delay."

"Is this an order?" I asked disconsolately.

"I regret, Monsieur," replied one of the two officers, "to have to tell you that it is an order."

There was nothing to do but to bow to the inevitable and prepare to depart. But where could we go? I remembered that in the neighbouring forest of St. Gobain there were some immense quarries capable of sheltering a number of persons. Decidedly, it was best for the moment to take shelter in the forest. In fact, we had little choice. We must obey orders, and the need was pressing. I resigned myself to the duty of warning M. and Madame O——.

It is easy to realise what a blow this was to my

poor old friends. Even now I cannot bear to think of their despair. In spite of all my efforts to break the news gently they were completely prostrated. I tried in vain to console them.

"We must leave, there is nothing else to be done, but we won't go very far from the château. The forest of St. Gobain is close by. There we shall be in safety. There we will await events. So far there is no proof that the battle will be here. They want us to leave simply as a precautionary measure, nothing else."

Through M. Béguin, the schoolmaster of Rogécourt (a Frenchman who did his duty nobly), I was able at the same time to warn all the inhabitants of the neighbouring parishes of the imminent arrival of the German troops, also of the evacuation order that I had received, and of the danger of disobedience. Servants were running all night from village to village. I had also sent, in the middle of the night, a convoy of cattle, horses, and waggon loads of provisions in the direction of the forest. If we had to camp out in the woods or in the quarries of St. Gobain, at least we should not die of hunger.

The arrival of my messengers in the seven parishes which surrounded the Château of Montrouge created intense excitement. "What is happening? What is going to happen? Are

they telling us the truth ? " . . . Panic, daughter of terror and mistrust, so distorted the warnings given by my heralds, that in some villages they believed the most terrible things ! " The ' Châtelains ' du Montrouge are flying by desire of the authorities. What will become of us ? "

At three o'clock in the morning, in the half-dawn, I saw assembled before the gates a crowd of 1,000 or 1,500 people, moaning and crying, some of them gesticulating threateningly.

" It is abominable ! It is the rich who save themselves. They abandon us, they are delivering us into the hands of the Germans. They must not leave ! "

In such an atmosphere of fever and revolt any untoward accident might have produced serious consequences. I hastened to interpose. I had lived in the country for twenty-five years, I was well known, and I hoped that they would listen to me. Standing on the top of a flight of steps, I began to speak. I spoke very simply, just as a friend, as one comrade to another, as one Frenchman to another, and tried to make them understand the true facts of the case. " Not only had we no wish to abandon them, but it was *we* who the preceding night had sent to acquaint them with the orders of the English staff. We were preparing to leave *with them.*

I had returned from Paris to Tergnier expressly to share their fortunes." These words calmed their fears, and restored their confidence and trust.

"You will follow us," I said to them. "And we will leave, all of us together, for the forest. There we shall be in safety! You all know how vast and secure are the retreats in the big forest quarries. There we shall have nothing to fear. There are abundant provisions awaiting us. *En route!* If the Germans really arrive, do not let them have the satisfaction of seeing French people disagreeing amongst themselves."

We started, all of us, for the forest of St. Gobain.

The forest of St. Gobain is only about a kilometre from Berteaucourt. A long line began to form, the O—— family driving, the others on foot, pushing their children and the few things of value they had been able to collect in wheelbarrows. Some carried loads on their backs. Others had heaped up baby carriages, with loved and familiar objects. In all, the column heading for the forest consisted of from 1,300 to 1,500 persons. During the march there were many who came to thank me, and to beg me to excuse their previous attitude.

Braves gens, equally sincere in their anger and their gratitude.

Once in the forest, we took the direction of Prémontré, passing by St. Nicholas au Bois. Once at Prémontré, provisions were distributed to everyone in the course of the afternoon. Some settled themselves in the vast stone quarries, and others found temporary shelter in Prémontré itself. As the weather was glorious, many camped out in the open air, sleeping under the stars . . .

Though I felt relieved at the satisfactory outcome of this our first day of exodus, I was worn out with fatigue, and fell asleep very sad. I woke early, torn with anxiety. What was I to do? What should I say to those who relied implicitly upon me?

The same English troops who the night before had established themselves at the Château of L—— began that afternoon to pass through the forest. They were, therefore, retreating. It was a bad sign. I tried to get some information from the officers. They refused almost fiercely to say a word. But by good luck I happened to meet amongst the soldiers an old comrade who was acting as interpreter for a telegraphic section, M. Seré de Rivières, the son of the *Bon Juge*, and I plied him with eager questions.

"I know nothing," was the substance of his reply, "only that the Germans are not far off.

All I can tell you is that there has been no battle at Montrouge."

This information was better than nothing. The next day, very early, I resolved to get at the truth. Taking an old servant with me, I set off on a reconnoitring expedition. I arrived at the edge of the wood, but how was I to get a good view of the surrounding country? I decided to climb a tree, though it was a long time since I had taken any exercise of that kind. With the help of some field glasses, which happily I had taken from the château, I had a long look all round. There was absolutely nothing to be seen. Nothing, nothing, nothing. Berteaucourt, Fressancourt, Le Montrouge, all appeared entirely deserted. The Germans had evidently not yet arrived.

The satisfaction of my companions can be imagined when, on my return through the forest, I was able to tell them that for the moment there was no sign of the enemy.

"But I intend to have another look a little nearer," I said to my friends. "Do not be alarmed."

I harnessed a horse and started in hot haste! Very soon I reached Fressancourt, and from there Montrouge. Silence and solitude reigned everywhere, but on all sides were distressing signs of war. On the roads were dead horses, discarded

objects of all kinds, even provisions. Here and there still smouldered the bivouac fires. I hastened to extinguish these, fearing a conflagration. Again I found broken guns, packages of cartridges. In the fort of Château L—— there was the same disorder. I collected from right and left an ample supply of provisions, and returned to the forest, where I received a hearty welcome.

The next day I again started for Montrouge. This time I found a French Infantry Division camping there. A sudden order caused them to depart hastily, and I had to destroy some important papers which, in their haste, the Staff forgot to take with them.

During all this time life amongst the emigrants had become somewhat organised. Some had made themselves fairly comfortable in the quarries. Others came and went between Prémontré and the neighbouring villages, asking shelter from relations and friends. Three days passed quietly. Then one afternoon a German aeroplane appeared in the sky. The next day we heard of the arrival of the Uhlans at Prémontré. All our previous fears and anxieties returned, the more so, that some hours later a troop of the "Hussards de la Mort" appeared. Was the tide of German invasion to engulf us?

No! Whether it was on account of the lack

of water at certain points, or whether their spies had warned them of the fortifying of the Château Landrin, and the improvised blockhouse behind, and they feared a trap, we could not know. Whatever was the reason, the Germans did not show themselves. We knew they had gone in the direction of La Fère and Soissons. We passed two anxious days waiting, waiting! On the third, unable to restrain my impatience and curiosity, I started for Montrouge. There, a delightful surprise awaited me. Not a trace of the enemy could be seen for ten miles round. I returned in haste to Susy, where M. and Madame O—— had found shelter the day before, and I ran to announce the good news throughout the forest. To everyone I repeated:

"There are no Boches near us. I think I am in no danger of disobeying orders when I advise you to return to your homes."

This proposition was too much in accordance with everyone's desires not to receive a unanimous approval.

"Yes, yes. Let us go home!"

Hot-foot, the return march was organised and the column started. The emigrants with happy faces, flattered by the hope that for them the tragic hours were over, took their homeward way, after eight days of forest life.

By the evening of the 9th September, the seven parishes which surround the Château du Montrouge had all resumed their normal aspect. I felt happy to think that I had contributed a little to this result, and had been able to be of some use.

"Come! perhaps things will go better than I feared after all," said I to my wife that evening.

From this pleasant dream I was soon to be cruelly awakened.

A few days later came the invasion. On the 10th of September, the German troops arrived in detachments, preceded by their columns of supplies. They established themselves, to the indignant astonishment of the inhabitants, at Rogécourt, at Berteaucourt, and in all the neighbouring parishes.

The very next day I received a visit from a superior officer. He announced that he was Chief in Command at La Fère, and issued an order that nothing, under pain of death, was to be moved from the château, the factory or farms.

"I notify you that henceforward everything here is the property of the German Army. In twenty-four hours you must have ready a complete list of all grain stored, and all cattle on these properties."

The hand of the invader was heavy upon us. Requisitions began immediately to be made.

From this moment I am unable to write as I should wish on the difficulties of the situation or the proceedings of our new masters.

I cannot forget that there, far away, I have left dear friends, compatriots, on whom an imprudent word might bring the most cruel reprisals. It will, I am sure, be understood why I remain silent. I ran a great risk, from the first, of imprisonment, for being neither intimidated, nor discouraged by the perpetual threats of our enemies, but I will now come at once to the circumstances which led to my arrest.

It was on Wednesday, the 4th of February, at half-past eleven. I was just paying the handful of workmen and workwomen, whom I had been successful in getting to work in the Sugary of Berteaucourt, and was thinking I should be glad of some lunch, when I was told that a German policeman wished to see me. When he was brought in the *quidam* inquired whether I should be much longer.

" You see," said I, " I have still fifteen workmen to pay."

" All right," he replied, " I'll wait."

" Another worry," I said to myself.

I hastened to finish the business, not so much from anxiety to know what the man wanted with me, but in order that my lunch might not be

delayed. Then, the last man paid, I questioned the policeman. He stiffened, made a grimace, and finished by announcing in the most deplorable jargon that he was much annoyed by the fact, but that he had orders to arrest me. To ask the reason why of an order from any policeman in the world is worse than useless; to argue with a German policeman would have been worse than folly, dangerous. Annoyed at the incident, for my appetite sharpened momentarily, I followed the man without a word. And I only protested when, on reaching the automobile which stood by the factory ready to start, I was told that I was to be conducted without a moment's delay to the Officer in Command at Crépy-en-Laonnois, seven miles off. I was forbidden to return to the château and get some clothes, or even to say good-bye to my wife and friends. On my expressing a wish to do this, the policeman nearly had an attack of apoplexy. No, no, the order was to start immediately, on fourth speed. Neither more nor less!

"How well I recognise your countrymen's habitual lack of courtesy," I remarked to the policeman. He appeared not to hear. Since the German occupation he had probably listened to many similar remarks. A quarter of an hour later we arrived at Crépy. Crépy is a nice little

town, with houses all down the street. The Commandant had selected for his own quarters, a pretty and comfortable little cottage. I appeared before the Captain of the Guard. He confirmed the order of arrest, and to my question "Why am I arrested?" he made an evasive reply.

"You will know soon. You will stay here at Crépy, and you will be treated as an officer."

As an officer! As long as it was not like a German officer I did not mind! I therefore followed a lieutenant who conducted me to what was to be my new residence. A sorry residence! It was in a poor house, in a room which had not been lived in since the death of its late lodger. A dark alcove with a dirty bed, a table and two chairs. The walls wept at the sight of such poverty. I mean that the walls oozed with damp! It was cold. The fireplace did not appear to have had a cheerful flame in it for months. Certainly my captivity did not commence very brightly. In addition, it was past two o'clock, and I was extremely hungry.

"As you have been so kind in finding me a lodging," said I to the officer, "no doubt you will take the same interest in my board. I should not be sorry to have some luncheon."

The Lieutenant looked at me, then said dryly, "Get some if you can."

Fortunately the owner of the house, Madame A——, was more solicitous for the guest whom German injustice had sent her. She gave me some food, excusing herself for being unable to give more, but not being well off before the War, she was now, since the occupation, almost in penury. Her two daughters and their children, turned out of Laon by the invasion, were now with her, and the little household was hard put to it to get food. In a room close by Madame A——'s husband, in the last stages of consumption, lay dying. He had become much worse during the last few days, and it was thought he had only a few hours to live.

The next day the Commandant had me notified by a non-commissioned officer that I was called before a court-martial. The news did not affect me much. I knew that in the majority of cases a court-martial is but a scarecrow to frighten unfortunate people.

I was indeed right! My appearance at the court-martial resolved itself into an interrogation of over two hours. A military police officer, *kriegsgerichtrat*, assisted by a sort of clerk and an interpreter, after having asked me for my surname and Christian name, begged me to reply to his questions. No formal accusation was made against me! Oh, no! All they asked me

were particulars as to the financial position of different people and their status generally. Incidentally, the military police officer cited to me certain facts which had happened in the Château du Montrouge. He repeated discussions which I had had with the officers and soldiers. . . . Before him lay an enormous *dossier* full of accusations collected against me, calumnious denunciations, anonymous letters, complaints, arbitrary and unjust accusations, dirt of every kind. Then in insinuating tones, with a thousand tricks of oratory, he tried to make me speak.

" If you only knew how you are wasting your time ! " said I, with secret amusement, to myself.

I profited by this interminable interrogation, however, to demand my transfer to another domicile, alleging as a reason Monsieur A——'s death, which had taken place two hours previously. He gave his consent to my accepting the hospitality of a friend, a friend of my own. I was conducted there under escort, and confided to the care of a Saxon trumpeter who established himself in a room next mine, with the orders that he was not to leave me by as much as the length of a foot.

Our friend prepared my meals. I stayed shut up in my room till the following Sunday, reading, reflecting, and thinking of my children, of my wife, of my friends. How I missed them all !

Sunday brought me the best of joys. My wife had at length succeeded in finding out where they had taken me after my arrest, and had extracted from the Commandant an authorisation to visit me. Some German officers, who were going to Laon, had dropped her at Crépy, and had promised to call for her on their return. Madame Desson brought with her news of our friends, also some linen, clothes and provisions, and, best of all, encouraging words, and something of her own brave spirit. During all the month I passed at Crépy, where I hardly ever left my room (for the constant attendance of the soldier following at my heels rendered the shortest stroll odious to me), Madame Desson succeeded in passing every Sunday with me. And even when she was unable to bring me any news of Tergnier or of our children, her courage and gaiety were very precious to me.

"Was my detention to last long?" The Monday after my arrival, I put this question squarely to the Commandant-in-Chief.

"What are you going to do with me?"

He smiled queerly. "You will stay here."

"A few days, a fortnight?"

The irony of his smile deepened. "Some months."

It appeared to me that this sarcasm was in

bad taste, the more so as, in spite of the solicitude of my wife, I was suffering cruelly from enteritis. I found myself reduced to the dire extremity of consulting a German doctor. He made me swallow an odious potion, which he called "La potion du Diable!" It was well named, for I suffered as if I was in hell.

From time to time the different parishes were heavily fined under I know not what pretext, (the invaders did not bother about right or reason) and the German authorities asked me if I would consent to become the intermediary to facilitate the payment of this fine. Naturally I refused; I was soon to suffer the consequences of this refusal.

It was exactly a month after my arrest, Wednesday, the 4th March, at 8 o'clock at night, and I was getting ready to go to bed, when two German policemen burst into my room and handed me a piece of paper. I was able to read this sentence written in bad French:

"By order of the General in Command, you are arrested. Prepare your valise to be sent to-morrow to Chauny."

"Well," thought I, "I imagined that I was already arrested."

"All right," I said to the *gendarmes*, "I will go to bed now. To-morrow I will be ready to start at any hour you wish."

"Not to-morrow," they replied. "You must follow us now immediately to the Commandant."

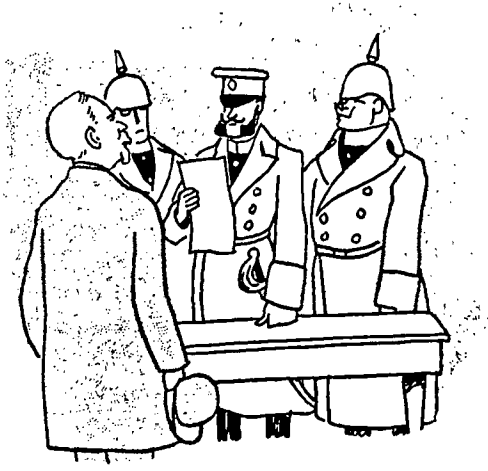
Oh, those insupportable Germans! I swore to myself as I packed my valise and followed them to the door. There a surprise awaited me, for outside there was another group of guards who attended me from the door to the Commandant's house. They were lined up in a row, and they all had electric torches in their hands. What an honour, and one I could have easily dispensed with! What was the meaning of it all?

I should not have been sorry to put this question to the Commandant. But the chief was not there. Or perhaps it was with that natural insolence which all Germans possess that he did not choose to receive me. I had to pass the night in the guard room, seated on a chair, amongst a lot of soldiers who were playing cards, hearing their cries, their loud disputes and their hoarse laughter. . . . When the morning came I was so exhausted by fatigue, that one of them, more humane than the others, brought me a cup of coffee.

It was midday before the Commandant deigned to remember me. They brought me before him. Stern, haughty, and tightly braced in his uniform, he was surrounded by officers all standing in stiff, threatening attitudes. With the airs of a

judge pronouncing sentence, he unfolded a paper and read me some sentences written in French. They were as follows :

" You are suspected of having committed acts similar to those for which German subjects have



Monsieur Desson is informed by the Commandant-in-Chief at Crépy-en-Laonnois that he is under arrest.

suffered capital punishment against the law in Morocco. You are therefore put under arrest."

" Again ! " I cried. " Sapristi ! For the third time. Once is generally enough, and, moreover, what has Morocco got to do with all this ? "

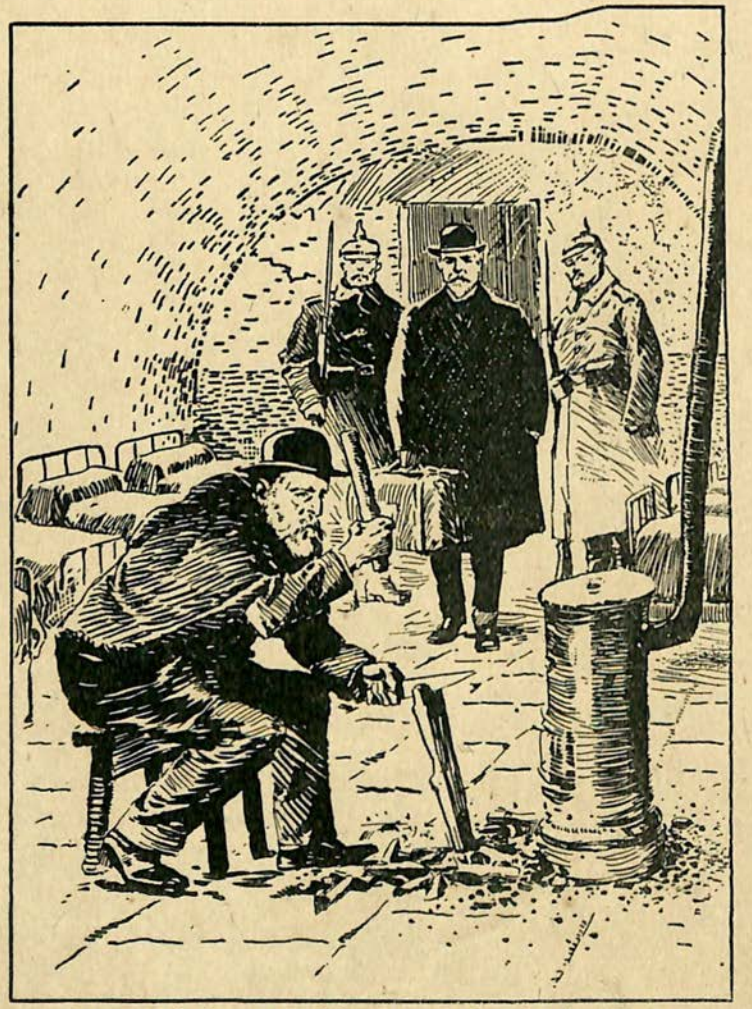
The Commandant-in-Chief remained impassive. A feeling of revolt took possession of me, and I continued :

"After all, what is all this you are talking about? Morocco! I have never set foot in Morocco."

"Monsieur," said the officer in tones of ice, "we are not here to argue about the orders given us. You are to be sent to the Fort of Hirson, and you will leave at once."

A few minutes later a carriage took me to Laon Station. I was pushed into a third-class compartment, and, between two guards armed to the teeth, I started for Hirson by way of Liart. I felt that I was leaving for an unknown and unfriendly land, and my heart tightened as I thought of the pain and anxiety of those I loved. In the midst of all my sadness and apprehension, I saw a sight which filled my soul with bitterness.

On arriving near Hirson I could see that our enemies had been able to reconstruct, near Origny, the famous bridge of Chaudron, which had taken our engineers eight years to build, and which our retiring troops had blown up. The Germans had substituted a solid bridge of iron. One of the soldiers who guarded me was able to speak a little French, so I questioned him. He told me that the braces, the floor and the principal pieces of the new bridge had arrived all ready to be put up, and that in ten days our enemies had erected them, put them in place, and



Stooping before a small iron stove, the shivering figure of an old man.

bolted and riveted them. I turned away, for I could not bear to listen.

We arrived at Hirson. After the usual boring ceremony of the presentation to the Commandant, I was conducted without loss of time to the fort. In many ways this was little more than a ruin. Between the two bastions, behind heaps of rubbish, was the entrance to a large corridor. A *Feldwebel* had taken possession of me with the same care and attention that he would have bestowed upon a piece of merchandise, and he now guided me through a maze of passages where our footsteps echoed disagreeably; then, with a sudden gesture, he opened a door and made me pass in in front of him. In the cold half-light of a window I perceived the outlines of a vaulted cell, and, right at the end, I thought I discerned stooping before a small iron stove the shivering figure of an old man. He had a cloak round his shoulders, and was splitting wood with the help of a big knife. He hit on this with a log.

CHAPTER IV

I WAS mistaken. The figure which I had taken for that of an old man had risen on hearing us enter. Seeing him stand erect, with an air of simple dignity, I started.

" Monsieur Noël ! "

It was true, I was in the presence of M. Noël, Mayor of Noyon, Senateur of the Aisne, Director of the Ecole Centrale, whom for many years I had held in high esteem. It was with mixed feelings that I found him here in this cell : sorrow first, and then a sense of deep satisfaction. Anyhow, I should not be alone !

" Under what pretext have they arrested you ? " he inquired after first greetings were over.

In one breath I repeated to him the sentence of the order for arrest :

" You are suspected of having committed acts similar to those for which Germans have suffered capital punishment against the law in Morocco."

" Exactly like mine," he said. " Have you ever been in Morocco ? "

" Never, have you ? "

"Never."

"But you know, don't you, what this means,

It was impossible to go to bed. We passed the night sitting by the stove.

'acts similar to those for which German subjects,' etc. . . . ?"

" I know no more than you."

Evidently the charge was but a pretext. Our persecutors had not given themselves a headache, fabricating such an absurd reason.

A deadly cold rose from the vaults and seemed to draw a mantle of ice round our shoulders. We filled the little stove with wood, and as we did so we remarked to each other that more prisoners were evidently expected. Ten beds, in wood and iron, without mattress, sheets, or blankets, were arranged perpendicularly against the wet walls. Night fell. The light of a small spirit lamp only rendered the darkness deeper, and denser around us. We were very cold and very depressed. At seven o'clock a soldier came to snuff out our little light. What could we do? It was impossible to go to bed. We passed the night sitting by the stove and exchanging views and impressions. M. Noel told me that in a neighbouring cell there were hostages from twenty-nine parishes, including Hirson. They answered with their lives, for a fine of 150,000 francs, imposed on these parishes by the General in command of the district. The history of this fine would have enlightened me, had I needed it, on the good faith of our present masters. Here it is in its painful simplicity.

The morning after the fall of Maubeuge, a com-

pany of infantry, who had succeeded in escaping, found refuge in the forests near Hirson. Notwithstanding the fact that they were surrounded by Germans, this handful of men, secretly fed by some devoted patriots, held out for several weeks—up to the time indeed when bad weather, winter, and illness triumphed over their bravery. Then, after having consulted with his men, the Lieutenant who commanded these heroes decided to give up the struggle. He and his company surrendered to the Germans, on the formal *condition* that neither the parishes who had helped them, nor any of the people in that region, were to be punished. The Lieutenant also stated at the same time that if this condition were not accepted he and his men were resolved to die to the last man, their arms in their hands.

The German General hastened to accept the terms offered to him. But no sooner did he have them in his power than he cynically broke his word of honour, and laid the heavy fine of which I have already spoken on the twenty-nine parishes round Hirson. Insolently he described it as a punishment for aid lent to rebels.

In order to insure payment of the sum, he took hostages from each of the penalised parishes, and M. Lethorey, manager of one of the banks of Hirson, was charged to collect the money. Mean-

while until the sum was found Madame Lethorey was thrown into a cell. In this way they were sure of the husband !

Sad as the night had been, the next morning was worse. To tell the truth, I thought for several hours that my end was near. I had just succeeded with the greatest difficulty in swallowing the horrible coffee which they had brought us at eight o'clock, when the *Feldwebel* opened the cell door and ordered me to follow him. This command was interpreted to me by the Comte de Forceville, whom I then saw for the first time, and who spoke German as fluently as French.

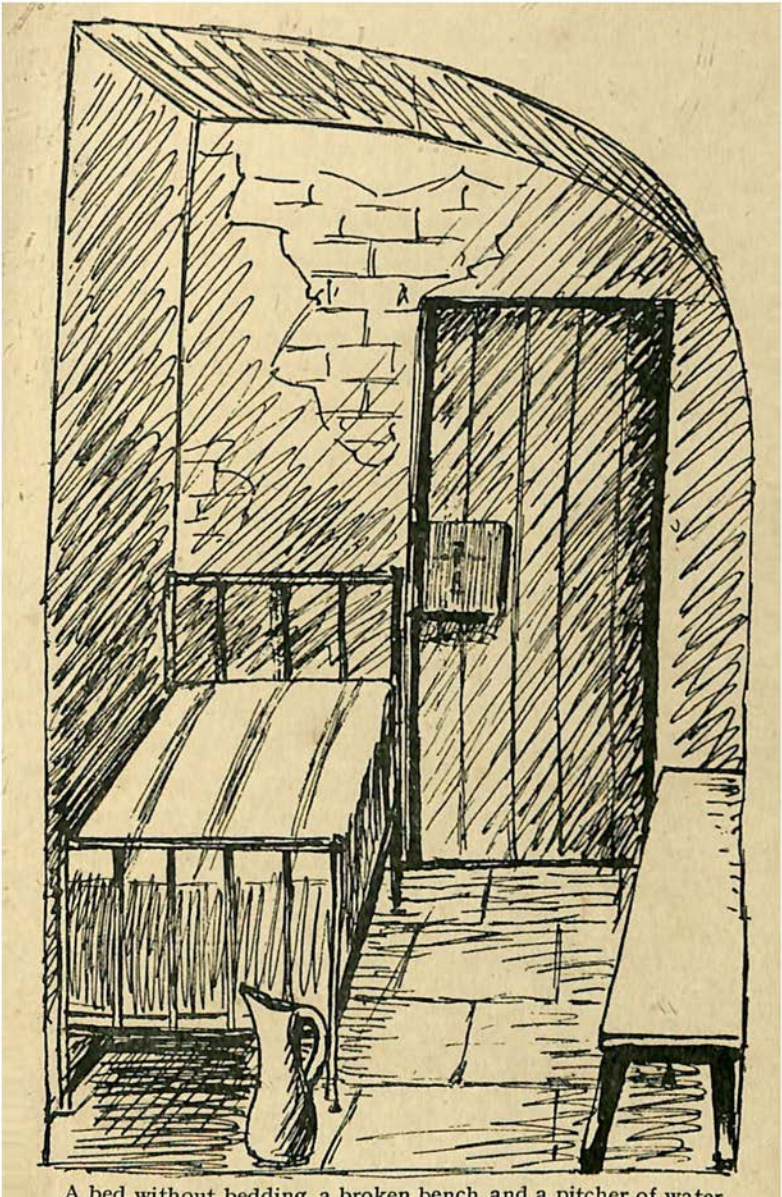
" Where are we going to ? " I asked, surprised and uneasy.

" To a cell ; make haste, I am in a hurry."

" My poor friend ! " exclaimed M. Noel, alarmed.

" Courage ! " murmured M. de Forceville in French. " One does not die in a cell. I have just been in one for five months. I shall be your neighbour."

I had indeed cause for anxiety, when I reflected on this sudden and increased severity ; I said good-bye to M. Noel, who was much upset, and I followed my gaoler into what he called my cell. A bed without bedding, a broken bench, and a pitcher of water. It was a dark hole, and frightfully damp. It was enough to give one one's death

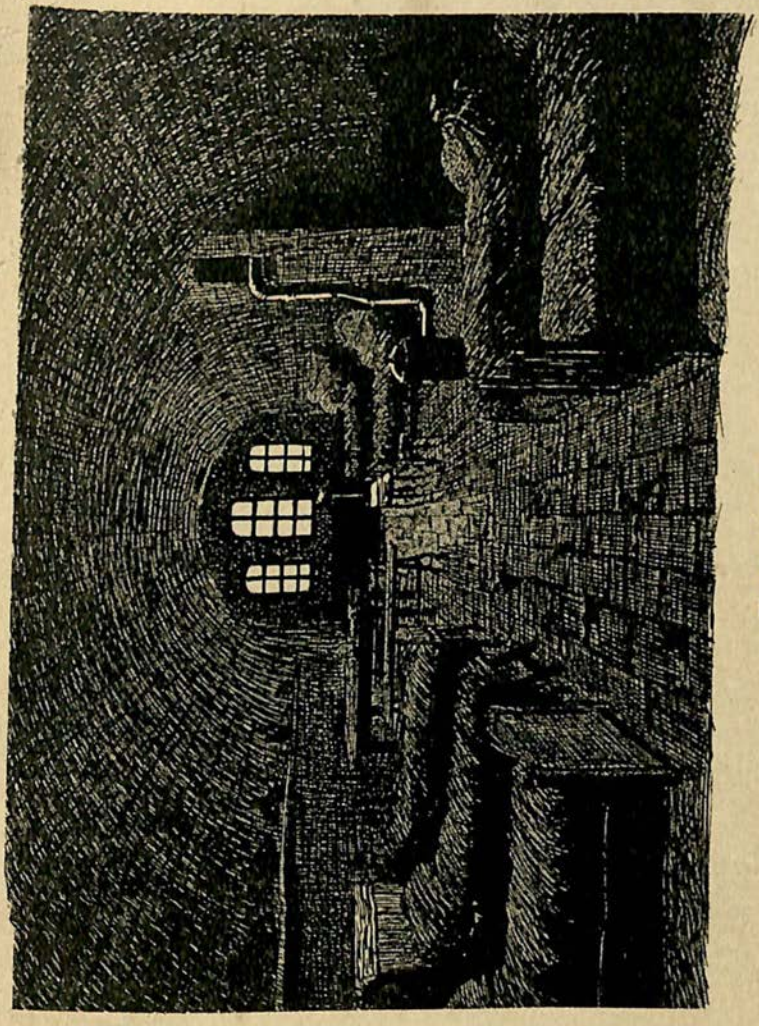


A bed without bedding, a broken bench, and a pitcher of water.

of cold in a few hours. I could not help thinking that this was probably what the Germans desired. At midday they brought me a plate of black and fœtid liquid, on which lay some slices of rancid bacon. Notwithstanding that the previous day my only dinner had been a meagre sandwich bought at Laon Station, I could not touch this mixture. My thoughts were elsewhere. I was preparing myself to send out to my dear ones a last expression of my affection, a last farewell. Might not, perhaps, one of those mysterious phenomena, which science is unable to explain, some dream, some presentiment, reach and convey to them my tender and deep love ?

The Comte de Forceville had to submit equally with us to the stern rule of the cells, but, owing to his fluency in the German language, he had the satisfaction of leaving his dungeon, now and again, to interpret for the *Feldwebel* with the French prisoners, the *Feldwebel* not understanding a word of French. He never failed in passing the door of my cell to throw me a brief word of encouragement. Never shall I forget the good those kind words did me, or the indescribable relief I experienced on seeing him and the *Feldwebel* enter my cell at six o'clock, and hearing him say,

" Good news ! I am ordered to tell you that



The Fort at Hirson.

there has been a mistake. You are to be taken back to M. Noel."

M. Noel received me with joy.

" I have been so uneasy about you, my friend. I am delighted to see you. You will help me to split up some wood."

In my joy I could have broken up and demolished all the furniture. I warmed myself near the little stove, which we stuffed to the mouth. Then we lay down on our small beds and tried to sleep, placing our valises under our heads in place of a pillow. We were completely exhausted by fatigue and emotion, and welcome sleep soon closed our eyes. Suddenly the door of the cell opened brusquely, and three new prisoners were ushered in—M. Jaconet, *Procureur-Général* at the Court of Douai; M. Catoire, Mayor of St. André-lès-Lille; and M. Plaquet, *Économe des Hospices* of the same parish. As soon as the *Feldwebel* had departed, we began to ask questions.

" What caused your arrest ? " asked M. Noël.

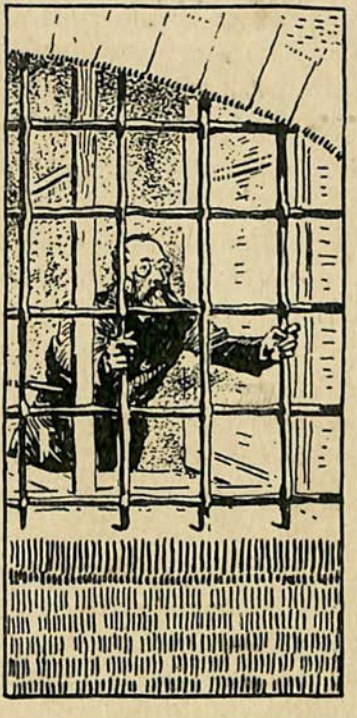
They replied with one voice.

" The order for arrest ran as follows :

" ' You are suspected of having committed acts similar to those for which German subjects suffered capital punishment against the law in Morocco.' "

" You also ! What does it all mean ? "

The newly arrived ones knew no more than we did. It was absurd, and that was all. What



M. Trépont had been incarcerated in that same cell where I had passed such cruel hours.

worried them most at the moment, was the question of where they were going to sleep! They had to do as we did, try to sleep in a bed without bedding. During the night there was a loud

noise in the passage. M. de Forceville, between two doors, managed to tell us that the *Préfet du Nord*, M. Trépont, had been incarcerated at three o'clock in the morning in that same cell where I had passed such cruel hours. Even the thought of it made me feel ill, and we exclaimed in melancholy tones:

"Poor M. Trépont."

Ah! how sadly that day passed. Our thoughts were with the unfortunate *Préfet* thrown into that ice-house without even a blanket. Our reflections were lugubrious in the extreme, and our hearts full of sorrow. At mid-day, at the sight of the bad-smelling mixture they brought us, M. Jacomet's stomach revolted.

"I can never eat that."

He did not eat it.

Next day two other companions were given us, the Comte de Francqueville and M. Dohet. We put the same question to them.

"Why are you here?"

"We are suspected of having committed acts similar to those for which——"

"Yes! Yes! we know the old refrain. 'German subjects have suffered capital punishment against the law in Morocco.'"

In spite of our lamentable situation, the absurdity of this order made us laugh. "The

repetition of the unreasonable," said one of my friends who is interested in theatrical matters, " is a sure source of mirth."

Our gaiety did not last long. M. de Francqueville was suddenly taken from us. His generosity of character had made us all love him, and our sorrow was great when without any reason being given he was taken from our sympathetic little circle and conducted to a cell. Revolt stirred within us. With what joy we could have assassinated that odious *Feldwebel* who in his brutality and cruelty was the incarnation of Teutonic officialdom.

At the same time that M. de Francqueville left us, another prisoner was brought to the door, which had remained wide open. He stepped briskly forward, and walked in coolly before the *Feldwebel* with an air of delicious impertinence. As his young, resolute face appeared in the full light the *Procureur-Général* cried out :

" The *Préfet du Nord.*"

" Himself ! " replied M. Trépont smiling. " Well, my dear *Procureur,* we meet again ! "

The *Préfet* and the *Procureur* embraced. One of us said to M. Trépont,

" They have then dared to arrest you."

" This makes the third time," remarked the *Préfet* with the same cheerful air. " But guess

under what charge this time. It is pure folly. You will never guess ! "

In chorus we replied,

" Folly is it ? We will tell you. . . . You are suspected of having committed acts similar to those for which German subjects have suffered capital punishment, against the law in Morocco."

And one and all before the astonished *Préfet,* we burst into shouts of laughter. Never before had those sad walls echoed so much gaiety.

CHAPTER V

Our laughter over, we discussed the situation. For to-night there was nothing to be done but to try and sleep, stretched on those beds, with our overcoats for covering, and to try and gain some strength. To-morrow we would have the Commandant of the Fort called, and we would see!

In reply to our message, he came the next day, and apologised for receiving us so badly, but he declared it was not his fault. With a very Teutonic want of tact, he added:

"In Germany the Forts are much better fitted up. There are comfortable rooms for officers. Here, there is nothing, nothing, nothing! Your compatriots in retreating demolished a part of the building; I will try and procure you if possible a little bedding." Soon after he returned with a prominent person in Hirson, M. Lethorey, "Chef de la Délégation communale." Touched by our situation, he promised to give us all he could, and the day after he sent some blankets, some towels, and even some boxes of tinned meats. But sheets were forbidden articles. Why, my God! why? Have German hostages ever wanted for sheets in France?

As we wrapped ourselves up that night in our blankets, our thoughts went inevitably to the unfortunate Comte de Francqueville, still rigorously confined in that dark and glacial cell. "However great his strength of mind," we kept repeating, our hearts full of pity, "will he ever be able to endure such suffering?"

M. L—— had also succeeded in getting some food to us, and a little coffee. With the wretched utensils with which they supplied us, I succeeded in making for each a cup of coffee which was quite drinkable. My companions declared it excellent. So satisfied were they that they promoted me Steward in Charge of the Commissariat. Like Maître Jacques in "L'Avare," I was, before it was over, to transform myself into a number of unexpected personages.

With the zeal of all new officers, I interceded with the Commandant of the Fort to obtain some ameliorations. First in the kitchen. The master *coq* of the Fort had been, before the War, a tramway conductor at Cologne. *There are ways of doing things!* I managed to obtain some provisions, and I undertook to dress and prepare them myself. From Steward I descended, or ascended to the grade of Cook! We had amongst us a chemist, M. Noël. With no suggestion of irony it was proposed that it should be his lot

to look after and make the coffee. MM. Dohet and Plaquet became my helpers. They peeled and washed the vegetables. M. Catoire undertook to stew the prunes when we had any; and he was given in addition the care of the cellar! Do not be deceived! The cellar consisted of some bottles of beer which they allowed us to buy in the Canteen, and water; such water! It was brought us from Hirson, by the night watchman of the town! What purpose had those barrels which he now filled with water served previously? I can hardly think of it without a shiver of disgust. How we boiled and reboiled this water, supposed to be drinkable.

They spared us no humiliation, but in spite of everything our life became to a certain extent organised.

A languishing, sad life, traversed by brief moments of gaiety, dominated by one fixed idea. What are they going to do with us?

In the evening, when the trumpets of the Fort had sounded "Lights out!" and darkness fell on us, we would gather round the little stove, elbow to elbow, heart to heart, and discuss one thing and another. We told of the acts we had witnessed, the atrocities of the Germans and their injustice. Our unanimous conviction was that before long we should be driven out of the cell by

soldiers, at the butt end of their rifles, taken to the ditch outside and . . . shot!

We weighed the chances of this eventuality, we discussed the details, we pictured it and prepared ourselves for it. If one morning at break of day, in the passage outside, where the steps of the sentry and the voice and song of soldiers sounded perpetually, a sinister clanking of arms should be heard and a platoon of executioners appear, well, they would find us ready!

M. Trépont kept up our spirits with his unfailing courage and good temper. For him victory was near and sure. We must only be patient. "To despair of our country's success is a crime," said he over and over again.

M. Noël had written to M. Antonin Dubost, President of the Senate, to beg him to inform the French Government that we were retained as hostages at Hirson, at the mercy of Germans.

We had each of us written also to our families to give them our news. The Commandant of the Fort in the course of one of his visits had taken charge of all these letters.

"I promise you they shall all be delivered to their proper address," said he formally.

We learnt later that not one of these letters was ever sent; German good faith plays these little games.

A charming little guest came amid all these happenings to share our captivity, and to bring by her presence a little happiness to our circle, One evening I heard some plaintive howls in the passage, those of a small dog being ill-treated by some brute. I adore animals, and though I had very little money I proposed to buy the poor dog. Happy to be rid of an extra mouth to feed, her owner, a brutal soldier, consented.

A pretty little dog was pushed into the cell. She threw herself upon us with cries of pleasure, as if overjoyed at her change of masters. She was of the breed of " Griffons Brussellois," and she had certainly been stolen from someone at Brussels. We baptised her Myrza, and her joyous barks and lively spirits brightened our lugubrious cell.

If any one of us appeared melancholy she would spring on to his knees and regard him with curious eyes, nestle up to him and play with him, and before long have him smiling. Pellisson had his spider, the prisoner of Saintine had Picciola, and we had to distract us the graceful and simple-hearted Myrza. I know many people with their full freedom who have not so much !

Myrza and our morning promenade. These were our distractions. This morning walk took place in a gloomy and deserted courtyard, situated

between the principal bastion and the outer enclosure of the Fort. From it you could see nothing but the sky. We walked our hundred paces under the surveillance of an armed sentry, who stood ready to shoot at any moment. Round and round we went, like wild animals in a cage. From the very first day we had baptised this courtyard " the Den of Lions." With his usual cheerfulness, M. Trépont made a bet that on a straight line which he had drawn he would cover, during the hour of exercise, a distance of six kilometres. The *Préfet* won his bet, and was proclaimed by unanimous consent Walking Champion of the Fort of Hirson. The sentinel was amazed at these proceedings.

One morning, to our great delight, the Comte de Forceville joined us. At that moment he had had nearly two hundred days of cell life. He could not restrain his joy at being with us again. It gave him renewed life. In spite of the abominable treatment he had received, his courage and energy were unabated. He came to us full of confidence in our final triumph. This splendid courage revived us, and for a while we were quite gay. Arrested first by way of reprisal " for atrocities committed by the French in Alsace " they now announced to him that he would be hostage for Morocco. They had served up to

him the now famous phrase, " You are suspected of having committed acts similar to those . . . " which had made us all laugh so much in the early days of our imprisonment.

" The two pretexts are about equal," thought he; " what is really essential is that I rejoin my countrymen."

Alas ! if we had only been able to receive news of our families, read a paper, receive a letter ! We begged the Commander of the Fort to relax the cruelty of this order. He had several plausible explanations to give why we received no answers to our letters. Hypocritically, he declared that he himself would see that any letters arriving for us were delivered immediately. Nothing arrived, and with good reason. We could have been no more isolated in a tomb.

CHAPTER VI

ONE morning we heard a great noise behind our door. The sound of footsteps, of brief commands, and the clanking of arms came from the passage. What did all this excitement portend? All at once the door was flung open, and the *Feldwebel* fully armed appeared on the threshold, his hand raised in salute to his helmet. He seemed petrified with awe and respect! Then like a blast of east wind entered a personage who, both by his air of importance and his uniform, we recognised to be a General. Short, stout, and vulgar, with bulging eyes and short panting breath, he had the head of a bulldog ready to bite.

He had pushed up his motor glasses on to his cap, and advanced upon us with a would-be terrifying look on his face. Without saying a word he stared fiercely at each one in turn, as if he would have liked to knock us down. His officers surrounded him; modelling their behaviour on that of their Chief, they eyed us insolently. Indignant at this want of courtesy, Myrza barked violently at the intruders.

On perceiving her, General Bulldog growled savagely. He threw a menacing glance round our little group and departed with the same abruptness which had characterised his entry, tapping his heels on the floor of the casemate. We looked at each other half-amused and half-alarmed. Who on earth was this Olibrius? We learnt later that his name was Von Truta, but at the time we thought he was no less than General Boum in person.

As soon as he had left, we heard again in the corridor the cadenced tread of many feet and the unmistakable sound of arms. What was happening? Had our last hour indeed come? Was Von Truta charged to preside at our execution? We waited in anxious suspense, trying to silence Myrza, who pursued our ill-bred visitor with queer expressions of hatred. At the end of a few moments the sounds died away and only the customary noise of the sentry's steps broke the heavy silence of our corner of the Fort.

The day passed without other incident. We remained puzzled and curious. The following morning, at the hour of our daily walk, on arriving at "the Den of Lions" we found some soldiers occupied in digging holes in the ground.

"Are those our graves they are preparing?" inquired one of us.

Would our executioners stop at this last crime ? Would they deem it unnecessary ? Was it the possible fear of reprisal which stopped them ? What dead bodies had already been buried in those ditches ? We should know one day. Whatever happened we had made the sacrifice of our lives. We considered ourselves, and with reason, as men condemned to death and awaiting the final moment. Generally this moment depends on the decision of the law, but with us, it depended on the caprice of General Von Truta !

At the moment we least expected it, they brought M. de Francqueville back to us. With what joy we embraced ! He had suffered horribly in the " cell of anguish," but though terribly thin and physically much altered, his *moral* was excellent. The same flame of patriotism burnt brightly within him. In this type of the true " gentleman " there is always the same high principle. We felt much comforted and sustained by his presence. In the midst of our satisfaction, however, a real sorrow befel us. It seemed as if one of us must always be tortured. At the same time that M. de Francqueville was given back to us, Plaquet was taken away. And he went to his death. . . . He may well be called a martyr.

Let the reader judge. Plaquet occupied a

modest position in the Hospital de St. Andre-les-Lille. He was steward there at the moment of the invasion. One day an Uhlan, dangerously wounded, was brought into the hospital. This Uhlan could not bear to be separated from his lance and his equipment. Perhaps seeing them near his bed may have brought him some faint consolation. He died and was buried honourably.

"What must we do with the lance and the harness?" asked Plaquet of the Administrator of the Hospital.

"Take them all to the storehouse," replied the Director.

Plaquet obeyed. Fifteen days later, by order of the German authorities, a search was made and the lance and equipment were discovered *in the storehouse.* The Administration was immediately accused of theft from the army of occupation. The Management laid the blame on the steward. "It was Plaquet who did that."

The unfortunate Plaquet was arrested and thrown into a cell. He begged to be allowed to say good-bye to his wife and children, but this was sternly refused, and after several days of imprisonment he was sent to Hirson, where he joined us.

Plaquet was a sickly little man, with a melancholy face and long falling moustache. He was

not strong, and it was really a miracle that he still survived after the severe trials he had been through. As he was taken away again to the cell he murmured,

" This time I shall die ! "

He saw alas ! too clearly. In spite of our encouraging words, he left us in despair. At the thought of this poor man, perfectly innocent, on whom death seemed already to hover with outstretched hand, a great sadness fell on everyone, the more as we were all more or less ailing. We were unable to keep ourselves warm in this underground dungeon, where the walls were always damp with an unhealthy dew. We all had terrible coughs. By a most providential chance I had in my bag a bottle of an excellent remedy which my wife, while visiting me at Crépy-en-Laonnais, had had the happy idea of slipping into my pocket. It was a mixture of Algerian essences. Stuff a pipe with cotton wool, drop on to it some drops of the mixture, and breathe in the vapour as if smoking. Few colds will resist this simple remedy. I give you the receipt for nothing.

This unpretentious treatment cured my comrades. Behold ! the Cook transformed into Doctor.

Alas ! poor doctor that I was, I could do nothing to help the unfortunate Plaquet when it pleased

the fancy of the Commandant of the Fort to replace him in the "cell of anguish" by M. Catoire.

Our comrade returned, livid, with drawn features, hardly able to stand upright, and with a firm conviction that he was a dying man; I could see that he was in very bad case.

"I can no longer eat," he said to me. "I vomit every instant."

We all tried to comfort him. Vain efforts. Each hour we seemed to see the unfortunate man step one rung further down the ladder of life.

Perpetual cold perspirations were unmistakable signs of his condition, and as I watched his attacks of sickness, I shuddered with horror.

"We must have a doctor."

To this we all agreed.

The Commandant of the Fort would not dare to disobey this urgent humane duty. The following day, in the afternoon, a German doctor appeared, and before me closely examined Plaquet. He spoke French fluently, and could thus question the sufferer intelligently. We could easily see by the expression of his face that he considered the poor man's case very grave. After the examination was over, he asked him—and this question alone is typical of the brutality

of the Germans—whether he had enough money to buy the medicines that he would prescribe. I replied in the name of all that we were solvent and would pay what was necessary.

The doctor wrote out a prescription which he handed to Plaquet. Then taking me aside, " I warn you," he said, " that your friend is a dying man. I think he has a cancer in the stomach. I will try and have him removed to the infirmary."

" It would be much better for him," said I, " if he could be removed to Lille, to his wife and family, who would give him all the care he needs."

The doctor bent his head as if to say, " Very likely." I insisted, and succeeded in convincing him.

" I believe you are right," he said at last. " I will have him removed."

He kept his word. Plaquet was told the next morning that that very day, he would be, not released, but transferred to the Hospital St. André-les-Lille, to that same hospice of incurables where for so many years he had been such a true and faithful steward. On hearing this news he smiled sadly, and murmured:

" That is true; it is the best place to send me. My poor wife! My poor children! "

Tears came to our eyes on hearing him. How were we to comfort the unhappy man? How to

give him some message of hope, if only illusory ? The next day, after the most heartrending farewells, he left us. Death had already set his seal on his face, and he was so feeble that he needed the assistance of a non-commissioned officer in addition to that of the *infirmier*.

It was not until our return to France that we heard that poor Plaquet had died fifteen days after his arrival at the hospital.

Who can say how mortal had been the blow of his abominable arrest, the horror of seeing himself abandoned by his chiefs, the tortures of his captivity, and how they had reacted on his poor frail body.

I can only trust with all my heart that the pleasure of being near his wife and children softened the last moments for that brave heart. Yet he was only one of the victims of German brutality.

CHAPTER VII

TWENTY-FOUR hours later one of us, Dohet, was released. He was a contractor from Rethel, and had been condemned to six months in prison for disobedience to German authority. He had now done them day for day. He left us with regret, so true it is that common misfortune links men powerfully together.

We also learnt at the same time that the twenty-nine parishes who had been fined 1,500,000 francs had succeeded in paying this exorbitant sum. They had created for the occasion a special banknote, the value of which was absolutely guaranteed.

Among the invaded districts there were a number of municipalities who, to escape immediate financial difficulties, had issued similar paper money. A friend of mine who is a statistician has calculated that a complete collection of these different notes, one for each district, would represent a value of 2,900 francs. The sum paid, the twenty-nine hostages returned to their homes. All of them left their cells in a pitiable state, their

health ruined. But what did that matter to their persecutors ?

As for us, we stayed on. Dark as was the present, and alarming as the future appeared, we forced ourselves to maintain a good spirit. Our cheerfulness we knew must be kept up at all hazards, and we missed no opportunity to amuse ourselves with little things. Happier than we, Myrza had succeeded during a walk in slipping outside the fortress. After a time she presented us with two charming little dogs. At our urgent request, M. Jacomet, *Procureur-Général* at the Court of Douai, promoted for the occasion, opened a register of births and entered their names. Everyone signed the official document. We drank . . . water alas, that baleful water, to the future of Hirson and Myrzette (for so we baptised the two dogs), MM. Noël and Jacomet declaring that they would make the future of Myrza's children their special care.

By childish pastimes were we diverted for a few moments.

Days passed, with their alternations of surprise, indignation, hope and gaiety. March, April, May succeeded each other without bringing us any relief. Of the glories of springtime we saw nothing. Even the first days of June had not lighted or warmed that dark underground spot

which became in our eyes more and more of a dungeon. Suddenly, on the morning of the 8th June, towards eight o'clock, the *Feldwebel* told us to get our things together, for at 10 o'clock we were to leave for Germany.

CHAPTER VIII

For Germany! Our astonishment and our sorrow can be imagined. At Hirson we were still in France. The air we breathed was still the air of our native land. What new trials and sufferings awaited us in that detestable country? We understood the menace of those words, "Leave for Germany." Certainly if they were taking us there they must have renounced the idea of shooting us. I am not sure that at that instant we should not have preferred a quick death to a future full of such fresh humiliations and sufferings as we anticipated. Two days previously they had added to our little group M. Lebas, Mayor of Roubaix, who had been arrested also on the idiotic pretext of Morocco, and a few moments before our departure, MM. Deloche and Coquerel joined us. All together we were conducted to the station. We were to be put in the group of the ten national hostages (National *Geiseln*).

We were crowded into a third class compartment. Before getting in with us eight soldiers

lined up on the platform and, at the command of an officer, noisily loaded their rifles in front of us. As we left I could see that we were going towards Charleville. But after Charleville?

In what colour our thoughts were painted can be imagined. However alarming may be the danger of the moment, it is nothing compared to the unknown, the terrifying unknown. Also, how were we to convey the news of our removal to those who were waiting for us in France—who were "hoping" for us, as they word it so gracefully in the South. Should we ever see them again? The example of poor Plaquet had shown us what the iron discipline of a fortress could make of a man. In future it would be still more difficult to obtain news of our absent country; yet another sorrow to be endured. To tell the truth, in all that long journey of forty hours we had only one agreeable moment, the hour of our breakfast at Charleville. As a special favour they allowed us to breakfast at our own expense in a private room at the station restaurant. For us, this was indeed a treat.

"We shall have some French cooking!"

We looked tenderly at the maids, the dishes, the bread—white bread! They brought us cutlets! Without waiting for forks and knives we bit into them voraciously. For the first time

since our arrest we had the chance of tasting wine. Wine, what luxury! Ah, dear country of France, by what secret fibres are we drawn to you! And with what incomparable joy our whole being responds to all that comes from your sky and soil!

From the train, which was taking us to what new tortures we knew not, we were able to see in passing devastated countrysides sown with ruins, from which rose skeletons of black burnt houses.

"Here is Sedan," whispered one of us during the afternoon.

Another cause for sadness. It appeared to us that three-quarters of the town had been destroyed. With a natural sequence of ideas, we wondered where the military operations were taking place, whether General Joffre had been successful, and on which side Fortune smiled. We would have committed any crime, in order to see a newspaper before leaving the soil of our country!

About eleven o'clock we reached Thionville.

"I warn you that you won't leave here till four o'clock in the morning," said an officer to us.

What should we do till then? The Station Master refusing brutally to allow us to pass the night on the benches in the waiting room, they marched us in the dark to a neighbouring building. There we were made to descend into a long narrow

cellar. It smelt vilely. Dirty straw mattresses had been thrown on the ground. "You will sleep there."

It was indeed a lugubrious sight which awaited us. Struggling against the nausea and vertigo caused by the vitiated air of this sewer, and the atrocious odours with which the atmosphere was filled, we prepared to lie down on our repulsive beds, an armed soldier between each of us, when our attention was drawn to the end of the cellar where, in the smoky light of the candles, we perceived some strange silhouettes. These queer silhouettes moved in a sort of fog, and were making supplicating gestures to us. They were like phantoms in a nightmare. Amazed we looked at them not understanding. Then M. Trépont gave an exclamation of pity.

"Russian prisoners! They look as if they were dying of hunger."

It was true. The disturbing silhouettes had come nearer. There before us, emaciated, despairing and piteous were five Russian soldiers. They looked at us with great miserable eyes, and, not being able to speak French, they held out trembling hands. This touching and wordless gesture said only too plainly: "Have pity, have pity, we are dying of hunger!"

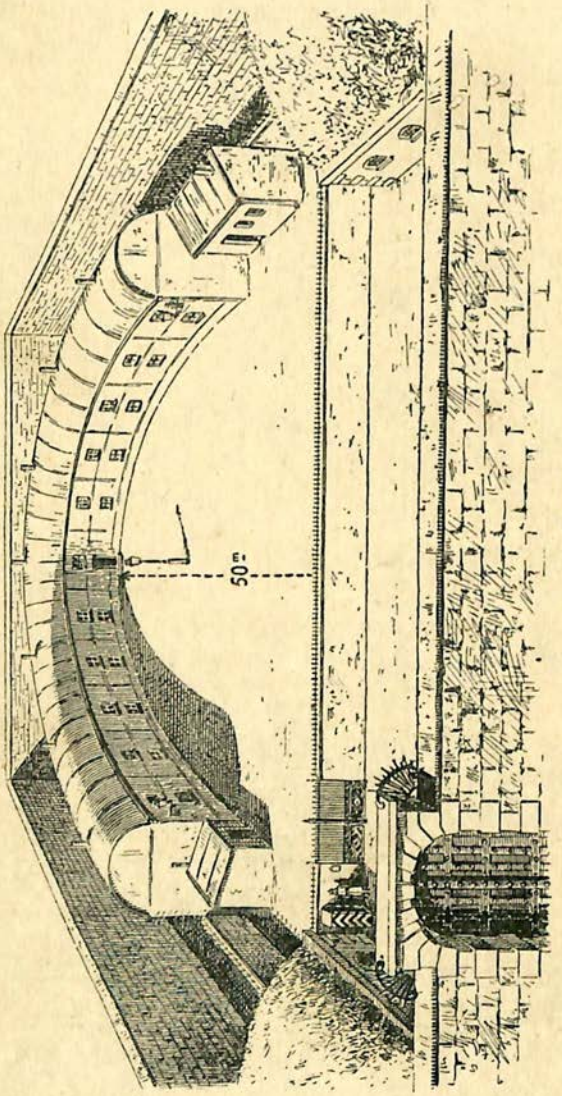
We were greatly distressed. Before us were

men even more unhappy than ourselves. Instinctively each of us felt in his pockets. At the buffet at Charleville we had been able to procure some sandwiches and some tablets of chocolate as well as our evening supper. With all our heart we held out to the poor wretches all that we had left. The soldiers who were guarding us, secretly touched perhaps, did not interfere. The Russians threw themselves on these meagre provisions. They devoured them like the starved victims they were. They thanked us with the most touching gestures. Their misery moved our pity and brought us fresh apprehension, for might not we in a few weeks be in the same painful condition. Yes, we were so harrowed by commiseration and anguish that the night passed before we could relax our strained nerves in the unconsciousness of sleep.

At last this miserable night at Thionville came to an end.

At dawn they called us, "It is time. *En route,*" and we started for the station, but not before we had given to each of the prisoners a little money. The poor wretches showered blessings upon us. The plaintive accent of their thanks might well have softened hearts of stone.

Once in the train, our uneasiness returned. Where were they taking us? The officer in charge of our little troop was not destitute of all humane



Bastion XII.

feelings. He belonged to the reserve, and had neither that conceit nor hardness of heart on which the lowest *Oberlieutenant* of the active army prides himself. In the afternoon, as we were crossing the Rhine, he said to us:

"I am ordered to take you to Rastatt. The castle of Rastatt is comfortably arranged, and it will be your prison. I hope you will be much better there than at Hirson."

As he spoke the officer appeared to us to be sympathetic and to speak with sincerity. In listening to him it never occurred to us that by a refinement of cruelty, perhaps, his pitiless chiefs had given him false information, in order probably to render if possible still more bitter the disillusion which awaited us. He himself can confirm how he deceived us. On our arrival at Rastatt at 5 o'clock in the evening, we were conducted in succession to two different barracks, from which we were in turn sent away. At last, after many winding turns, we arrived before a long, low building. Its aspect was only moderately engaging. The same thought struck us all: "What a strange château!"

Over the entrance, nailed to the wall, was a written inscription, the word in French, Bastion! and the number XII. *Bastion* 12. Behind this door began our road to Calvary.

CHAPTER IX

If you want to get an idea of Rastatt, think of Neuilly. It has for those who merely glance at it in passing the same impression of a calm and silent city, of avenues without shops filled with coquettish little villas and gardens. A number of peacefully sleeping cottages. Notwithstanding, it has many sinister recollections attached to it. In this quiet corner, so peaceful in appearance, two or three deputies of the council of five hundred, who represented France at the Congress of Rastatt, Roberjot and Bonnier, were traitorously assassinated on the 28th April, 1799, by order of the Archduke of Austria.

The third, Jean Debry, escaped death only by a miracle. M. Trépont told us of this crime, and of how, in order to render homage to the two murdered *representants*, the council of the five hundred (after proclaiming the murder before the whole of Europe) had decided that at every Roll Call of the Members at the Assembly, when the secretaries called the names of the victims, the president should pronounce solemnly :

" Assassinated at the Congress of Rastatt."

And the Secretaries added, " May their blood fall on the authors of the crime."

The name of Rastatt awoke therefore in the minds of all more or less cultivated Frenchmen the idea of a *guet apens*, and our first steps in the prison roused in each of us, though with no cowardly fear, a sense that something of the sort might be our fate.

The *Feldwebel* received us awkwardly.

" They have just notified me of the arrival of ten new prisoners," he said to us, " but there is no room here; I do not know what I can do with you."

All we asked for was a bed and rest. But at the sight of the cell destined for us our indignation burst forth.

" We shall die here for want of air ! "

Imagine at the end of a passage a small chamber, hardly four by five yards wide, dark, with only one little window, across which enormous iron bars had been placed. Against the walls five tiers of wooden planks were arranged, after the fashion of berths on board ship. These were our beds. The chamber was so small that three men would have found themselves ill at ease, and we were ten ! In a few moments it became unbearable.

" We cannot stay here ! We insist on seeing the Commandant of the prison," we cried.

More and more uncomfortable, the *Feldwebel* explained that the Commandant lived in the town, at some little distance, and that we could not see him till the next morning.

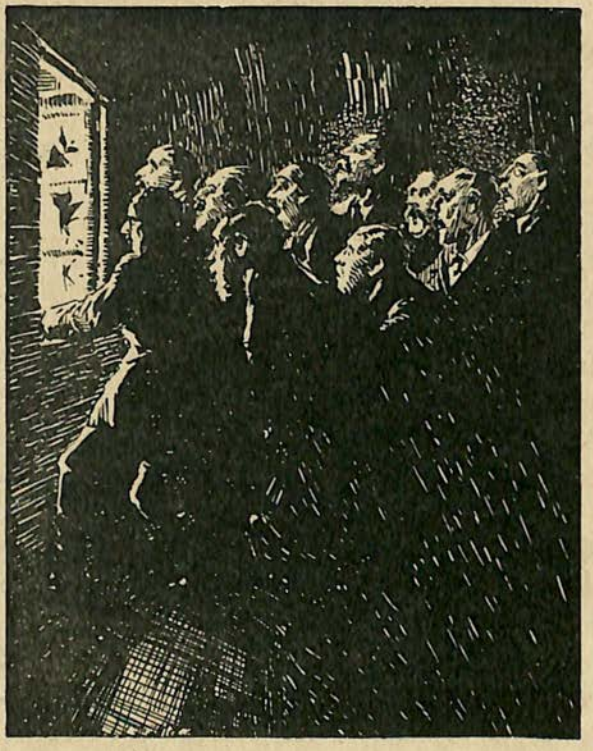
"Try to make the best of it for to-night," he added.

Then without further parley, after double-locking the door, he left us. This was a promising beginning for our stay at Rastatt! We were furious. One of us immediately proposed to draw up a protest, but we had no writing materials. All things considered, it was perhaps best to wait till to-morrow.

It was then about six o'clock at night, and we very soon realised that we should have to give up all hope of having any dinner. We nibbled the few provisions left us. After which with empty stomachs, splitting headaches, angry and dejected, we tried to make ourselves as comfortable as we could for the night. We climbed on to the berths, the stouter of us taking the lower ones. Then with all our will we prayed for sleep, blessed sleep!

This was all very well, but at the end of twenty minutes in that overheated air we felt suffocated. The perspiration poured off us, the blood beat furiously in our arteries, and our lungs overcharged with carbonic acid called for fresh air. A good

many of us were in a high fever. A few more moments, and we must have died. Air, air! We needed air!



"For God's sake, some air!" entreated one of our companions, half fainting.

The window! we must at all costs open the window!

I sprang to the fastening. It was rusty, and seemed to be soldered to the casing. I exhausted myself in vain efforts.

" For God's sake, some air ! " entreated one of our companions, half fainting.

It could not be helped ! I sent my fist through one of the panes. Even if this crime drew on us some punishment, what torture could they inflict worse or more agonising than this slow death by suffocation ? *Primo vivere.* Through the broken pane we took turns to inhale some breaths of pure air. Still it was not sufficient to fill our lungs. Revived by some long breaths, I shook the frame violently. It opened. The air rushed in, and we felt reborn.

The Comte de Francqueville passed the night crouched in front of the window. The rest of us, now that we were not to die of suffocation, lay down again on our hard planks. It was another sleepless night. If only we had known what the morrow was to bring us !

Next morning we had a visit from a Lieutenant, who, scornful and haughty, appeared on the threshold (there was indeed no room for him to enter), and after examining us like beasts in a menagerie, counted us over and disappeared. A little later, the *Feldwebel* announced the Commandant's visit. The Commandant would cer-

tainly never have been able to apply to himself the joyful refrain in Fragson's song, "My face is so sympathetic." Imagine a tall thin man with a stoop, a pale face, drawn features and hard cruel eyes. I thought to myself that such an ill-favoured individual, who must be suffering from some internal malady certainly wished to revenge himself by causing all who surrounded him to suffer in a like manner. He listened very ungraciously to the complaints which M. de Francqueville put forward in our names. Then he said:

"I am exceedingly surprised at having been sent prisoners like you. This is a military prison and not for common law criminals. Moreover, the prison is full. I am going to telegraph to Berlin to find out if there is not some mistake."

Common law criminals! So they looked on us as thieves. We expressed our indignation, and, rather disconcerted at our protestations, the Commandant repeated:

"Perhaps there is some mistake. I will refer the matter to Berlin."

Meanwhile he was evidently anxious to be off, the air in our hole had already made him feel uncomfortable. He saw us panting, half suffocated in spite of the open window, and he got away as quickly as he could.

"I will try and find you a larger place. Good-morning."

They did find him a "place" in a neighbouring room (*zimmer* 51). It was twice as large, and a little higher than our black hole. The change was made during the afternoon, and this time we were not forced to sleep one above the other. We chose our beds, I mean to say the bare frames on which we slept without sheets, and with only a blanket, the Comte de Francqueville and myself in one corner, which made a kind of alcove, M. Lebas at the left of the entrance, facing the door MM. Deloche and Coquerel, M. Trépont and the others at the further end.

Certainly this miserable lodging was neither comfortable nor hygienic. Stifling in summer, it was most probably freezing cold in winter. As for furniture, there were the table and the traditional pitcher of water. The windows were heavily barred, and only one was open to allow of the entrance of light and air. From it we had a view of a grey courtyard, very dirty, with dingy buildings surrounding it. It would be hard to find anything more cheerless. Notwithstanding, when we compared our new residence with that other infamous hole we almost fancied ourselves in Paradise.

I pass lightly over many of our most humiliating sufferings. Our needs were much less looked after than at Hirson. At Rastatt the sentinels were not stationed in the corridors, but in the courtyard and round the outside. If we were ill or needed anything we had to call one. He then transmitted the call to the warder, who then went to collect two armed soldiers, who, as can be imagined, were in no hurry. The nights were terrible. The badly-ventilated cell with its one small window became in course of time almost unendurable.

"It smells like a wild beast's den," said the *Feldwebel* one day.

By dint of entreaties I succeeded in ameliorating to some extent these trying conditions. Never before had we realised the limitations of the human body.

In the midst of all our troubles the *Préfet* laughed and joked, perhaps in order to hide his real feelings, and to set us a good example. Sometimes we said to him:

"Is this how they treat you who rank as Excellence? Really, they are wanting in respect for you."

He laughed with that hearty laugh of his, full of courage. "What can you expect? These Germans are only half educated."

CHAPTER X

THE very first day the Commandant of the Fort had put up in our cell the orders for our daily rule of life. At six o'clock rise. At seven, coffee and a bowl of "gravy," without bread. At ten o'clock a walk in the inner court. At half-past twelve the only repast of the day, consisting of soup made from fat pork, potatoes cooked in water, with from time to time the end of a sausage, or a finger of boiled beef. Every twenty-four hours a piece of black bread weighing about five hundred grammes. In the afternoon, at half-past four, we were allowed a few moments in the court again. At eight o'clock a cracked bell sounded for the extinction of all fires.

It was in fact the daily round (except that they did not dare to give us manual labour) of thieves, deserters, assassins, and criminals of all kinds, who had indeed been our neighbours. This promiscuity appeared quite natural to the Commandant. No doubt he had received orders from Berlin to be particularly severe with us. With great insolence he refused us leave to walk in a little

garden adjoining the court. From his attitude towards us and the severity of his orders it was easy to see that, in the eyes of our persecutors, we had ceased to be hostages and had become condemned men. Every possible hardship was inflicted on us. It was with the greatest difficulty, after a thousand appeals, that we were allowed to write *once, and only once,* to our families, to tell them where we were, and to give them the official address, without which no letter could have reached us. I do not know German. I have not the slightest wish to learn it, but never shall I forget those few words which, like a talisman or, more truly, like the crack in the wall of a tomb, were the means of allowing a little French air to reach me.

"M. Desson.

"*National Geiseln Festung gefaengniss. Bastion XII. Rastatt.*"

We owed this favour in some measure to the goodwill of the *Feldwebel.* He had shown us sympathy from the first. Our unhappy state touched him visibly. We heard later that one of his brothers was a prisoner in France. Perhaps he thought that by treating us humanely some mysterious justice would arrange an equally good treatment for his brother in France. Without ever infringing the rules which he was instructed

to enforce, he managed often to temper their severity by little attentions which rendered them bearable. Thus it happened that the first day we arrived in our cell, the day after we had so nearly been suffocated, we found on the table a small bouquet of field flowers. This little attention was the means of showing us not only the delicacy of our warden but also the hatred and bad feeling of others. On returning from our afternoon walk we found the bouquet which had given us so much pleasure had disappeared. A German had thrown it away. We suffered a good deal from such acts of meanness, and often after returning from our short walks we found that the soldiers had helped themselves to things they fancied from amongst our little stock of clothes.

The *Feldwebel* had an impossible name. He was called Sczypeck. It was pronounced Chipeck. A suitable name for many Germans. He was himself strictly honest. He was a big handsome man, very fair, with blue eyes and a moustache *à la* Kaiser. His fine erect carriage, as well as his frank pleasant face, prepossessed one at once in his favour. This German was an exception to the rule. He will never rise to great heights in his country.

Obliging as he was, he had not the power to change the rules. The meagre repast which was

served us once a day was manifestly insufficient for men like us in the full vigour of life. At the end of a short time we began to suffer from hunger. The good *Feldwebel* did not dare to authorise us to buy additional food. He would have been at once denounced to the Commandant. Germany is the land of secret information. Little by little we grew feebler. Some of us became alarmingly so, and at last one night one of our companions was taken ill.

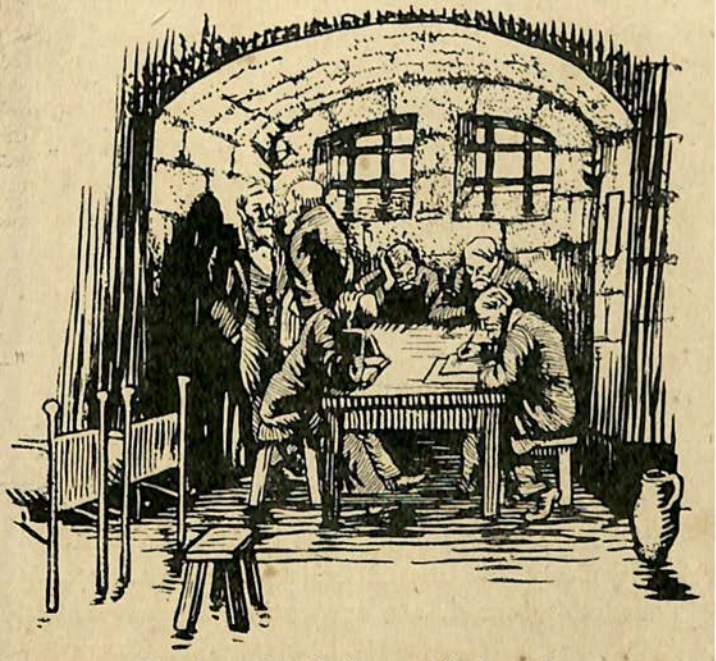
One of the doctors of the town, Doctor Kohler, spoke French. The *Feldwebel* sent for him, and the practitioner had no difficulty in discovering the cause of illness: the man was suffering, as we all were, from want of proper nourishment. He undertook to speak to the Commandant, with the result that we were allowed to buy in the village, through the intermediary of the canteen agent, some small items of provisions such as boxes of sardines, coffee, jam, beer. But at what a price! My God, what a price! Wine, which would have given us strength and fortified us, was never allowed by the Commandant. This German, who suffered from an internal malady, was obliged to drink water. A double reason to refuse a glass of wine to Frenchmen.

CHAPTER XI

CONFINEMENT inflicts three different kinds of torture on prisoners. First (and M. de la Palisse would have liked this reflection) privation of their liberty, that liberty of which, as poets tell us, half our soul consists. Then the deprivation of all affection or tenderness! and finally enforced idleness, deadly inactivity. When the prisoner first enters his cell, the most merciless of executioners enters behind him; his name is boredom. It is an appalling boredom, which paralyses the arms and gnaws at the brain of the unfortunate inmate. How to employ the long waking hours? In what dream can one absorb one's thoughts and drown one's misery?

The good *Feldwebel* had given us paper, pens and ink. The *Préfet* succeeded in obtaining an English Grammar and set to work to complete his knowledge of Shakespeare's tongue. Fired with zeal by this good example, M. Lebas procured a German Grammar, and set to work to study our enemies' idioms. Hard work distracted us a little from our troubles. The *Procureur-*

Général, with the fine taste which was his, gave himself up to a study of the eighteenth century poets.



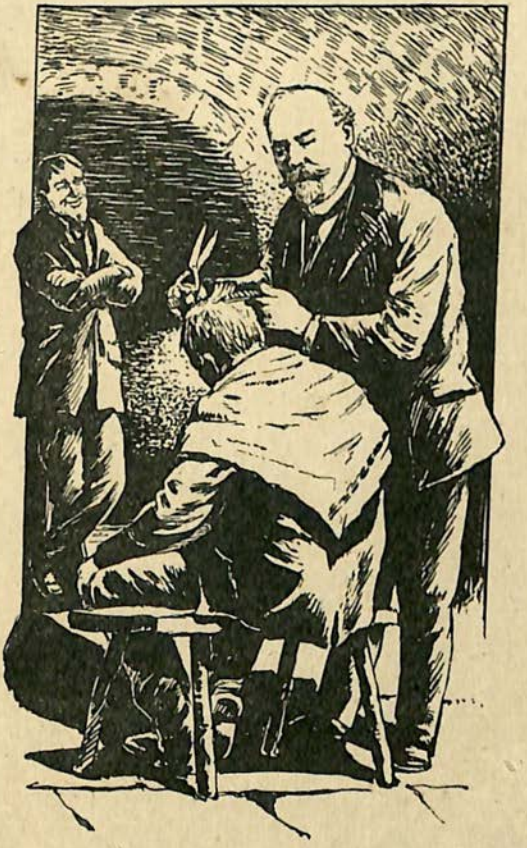
How to employ the long waking hours?

M. Noël and I talked mechanics and electricity. The Comte de Francqueville, ever generous, employed himself in discovering different ways of helping his countrymen in all parts of the prison, and conveying to them small sums of money.

MM. Coquerel and Deloche took care of our housekeeping. We killed time as best we could.

It goes without saying that since our internment we had not seen even the shadow of a hairdresser. Not one was allowed to approach us. Our beards and the length of our hair would have been the envy of a man-dog. The idea struck me one morning that I should become *coiffeur* for my companions, no payment taken, I may add. I first practised upon Deloche, whose head had begun to resemble a virgin forest. I persuaded him to let me cut his hair and shave his beard. Deloche is a man of courage. He allowed himself to be experimented on. On the day fixed for the operation our companions made a circle round us, whilst I wielded first the scissors and then the razor, not, I may say, without some inward apprehension. Suppose I should wound my customer or myself? These qualms, which I understand are inseparable from a *début* of any kind, did not, however, prevent my acquitting myself well. If a few "ladders" in the cutting of the hair betrayed the amateur, the shaving was a triumph; not a single cut disfigured the face of Deloche, and M. Trépont mischievously said when I had finished:

"You deserve a *Diplome* from the Association of Hairdressing."



The idea struck me that I should become *coiffeur* for my companions.

After this triumphant *début*, it can be easily imagined I had plenty to do. Every two days

the "*Salon de Coiffure de Messieurs les Otages*" was open. This my fourth transformation from the part of doctor to that of *Figaro* was the source of great amusement. Truly we French preserve in the midst of our greatest troubles a fund of undying gaiety. Notwithstanding, our horizon grew daily darker. Days passed without news of any kind from France. We had decided to write once a week to our families. What had happened in our absence to our dear ones? Had the Government been informed of our situation? Did they know in France the real motives of our iniquitous arrest? And all these anxious questions could have been answered by one letter from home. But nothing came, and with good reason. Those letters which we imagined had passed the lines and reached home bringing consolation, those letters which bore with them something of our very soul, were thrown without doubt into the waste paper basket. The Commandant, as if uncomfortable at our many anxious questions, avoided us, and we ran no risk of meeting him. The cruelty of this man erected between us and the world of living beings an impassable wall, against which we could not, even in our hours of despair, dash out our brains.

What a sad 14th of July we passed! This

national *Fête* awoke in our hearts an indescribable emotion. We thought of France, of our families, of our friends, and we could not overcome our sorrow. At breakfast M. Trépont made us a touching address. He exhorted us not to despair but to believe in ultimate victory, in eternal France. When he had finished we gripped his hands without a word. Had we spoken, we should have burst into tears.

On the 25th August we had a great surprise. The *Feldwebel* announced to us that we were to receive a visit from Colonel Freederich, who had come from Berlin, and had been deputed by the German Minister of War to see us. What could he want ?

In any case we would profit by the occasion to find out the cause of our arrest, and if possible what they intended to do with us.

This he told us, in plain words, without any circumlocution, directly he entered. He was accompanied by the odious Commandant of the Fort, who was as obsequious to his superior officer as he was arrogant to us. Of Colonel Freederich I shall say nothing, except that physically he had rather the appearance of a policeman who ought to have been a prisoner!

" Gentlemen ! " he said to us, " you complain that you do not know the real cause of your

arrest. You are, as a matter of fact, detained as hostages in reprisal for the atrocities committed by your Government in Morocco. Some of our citizens there, who were completely innocent, have, in defiance of all law and justice, been shot. You are the guaranty for the safety of others. If any of them are subjected to any further bad treatment, I regret to have to tell you that you will be shot at once."

Then entering into details, he related to us a story of some ruffians in distant Morocco of which we did not believe a word. Colonel Freederich must have had a poor idea of our intelligence if he imagined that we swallowed such rubbish. " Two hundred Germans," it seemed, " assembled at Casablanca, were living in a state of idyllic peace without meddling with anything whatsoever, when suddenly, because they had been traitorously accused of conspiring against our rule in Morocco, and of conspiring with the rebel tribes, they were thrown into prison. As if they were not at liberty to use electricity at will, and to say 'Good-evening' when at a distance from their friends."

M. de Francqueville translated piece by piece this statement, pardon me, I ought to say this fable, of the Colonel's. We begged him to reply in our name, that it was for us to accept or

disagree with the situation in which we found ourselves, but that, as we were hostages, we had the right to be treated as hostages. And that our present treatment, that of rigorous confinement in the midst of criminal prisoners was in no sense just or reasonable. This argument made some impression on the Colonel.

He replied, " I see, truly, that your position is a painful one, and I trust I may be able to ameliorate it. On my return to Berlin I will suggest different measures. I have heard that six of our compatriots are to be liberated. If this is so, perhaps they will be able to exchange six of you here."

M. de Francqueville asked him whether in the meanwhile we could not have some papers. The Commandant of the fort immediately joined in the conversation, saying in a mocking tone :

" If you need a paper, you have only got to read *La Gazette des Ardennes*."

We had all of us read and rejected with disgust this infamous little rag with which the Germans flooded the country, especially the invaded regions. This paper, which was full of lying statements, was one of the means by which they hoped to influence and intimidate.

We were told, indeed, that this disgraceful pamphlet was edited by one of our own country-

men, seduced by German gold, but I cannot believe that any Frenchman could be capable of such a degree of infamy. Should it be so, may the blood of all their victims fall on this servant of the murderers.

In the most dignified terms, M. de Francqueville put before the Colonel our reasons for not allowing this paper into our dungeon.

The expression of the officer's face showed us that in spite of himself, perhaps, he approved our attitude. The first punishment of traitors is distrust of those who pay them.

"We should even prefer," declared M. de Francqueville, "a German newspaper."

"Good," said the Colonel on leaving, "I will give instructions, gentlemen, on this subject."

The next morning they brought us *Le Francfurter Zeitung*, and M. de Francqueville and M. de Forceville translated the principal passages to us. Even through that thick layer of inventions a little of the truth filtered. The German sheet told us of the entry in the field, of Italy on the side of the Allies, and we gave a hearty hurrah in Italy's honour. Every day we tried to extract through the heavy German phraseology, some scraps of comfort and hope. It was perhaps the first time that a German paper has given pleasure to Frenchmen.

At the same time we perceived that new orders has been issued to the Commandant. His arrogance sensibly diminished, and he posted up a notice on the wall of the dungeon, saying that from henceforward we should be allowed to send to France two letters a month and two postcards, or else six postcards.

The wall which separated us from the outside world was beginning to crack! At least, we allowed ourselves to think so, but we were not long in finding out the tricks played on us. They kept our letters for a fortnight, and when at length some answers reached us at the end of August, they took care to keep them in quarantine before delivering them.

Moreover, they opened the letters and amused themselves by scribbling odious remarks on them of their own, thus dishonouring those cherished messages, and largely spoiling our pleasure in them.

In spite of a few relaxations, the *régime* of the prison began to affect our health in a most alarming way. Many of us had fits of depression amounting to despair, and I remember the cry of the *Procureur-Général* one afternoon, when, leaning against the bars of our cell, he exclaimed from the bottom of his heart:

"Ah! never could I have believed how dreadful it is to be in prison."

I answered him, laughing, " Between ourselves, M. Le Procureur-Général, it is really your turn, then, is it not ? "

An innocent joke, which this excellent man was the first to enjoy.

Towards the end of September a general physical weakening in some of us was noticeable. The Comte de Francqueville had attacks of vertigo, and Doctor Kohler, again called in, deemed his removal to the Fort Infirmary advisable. Two days later a severe attack of bronchitis obliged Coquerel to follow him. The rest of us suffered from many painful maladies.

Slight commonplace indispositions we made light of, but things became at last very serious. We began to look at each other askance, noting with anxiety the changed faces, on which were plainly written the signs of serious illness. Secretly we asked ourselves, " Who will be the first to go ? "

CHAPTER XII

OUR worst suffering was the total ignorance in which we were kept. Did the French Government know of our internment in Rastatt ?

The Commandant said to us one day, almost amiably, while giving us our letters :

" It is easy to satisfy yourself on this point. You had better write to the Embassy of some neutral Power, for instance to the Spanish Embassy, and beg them to transmit your *desiderata* to your Government. I promise to have your letter delivered. But, let me think. . . . Why not write also to M. Beau, your representant at Berne ? "

It was a trap ; neither of the two letters we wrote ever arrived at their destinations. Later, when we passed through Switzerland, M. Beau assured us that he had never received any letter. The Commandant had thought this was a good way to discover our state of mind and what complaints we had to make ! What he was able to gather from these letters was that even in the most painful situations Frenchmen knew how to endure and how to control themselves !

Our life dragged on. Our only distractions were our daily walks in the courtyard, and the sight of our fellow prisoners.

I have, in my time, been something of a caricaturist. Circumstances now led me also to become a painter of religious subjects. During the month of August several of us had asked permission to hear mass, and the necessary authorisation was accorded us. In a long and narrow dungeon, an Alsatian chaplain, a prisoner like ourselves, had managed to arrange a sort of altar on a table.

Mass was said in Latin, and we listened to it surrounded by common criminals.

At the conclusion of the service I had the opportunity of having a few words with the priest. I expressed to him my regret that the service had to be held in such a miserable place, and I offered, should the Commandant give his consent, to clean and decorate this dungeon now transformed into a chapel. Delighted with this offer, the chaplain took the necessary steps, and, contrary to all expectation, the Commandant referred our request to the General in Command of the district, who, either through kindness or cunning, gave all the necessary authorisations. He even placed some of the prisoners at our service. Amongst these was a decorative painter from

Dusseldorf, condemned for serious infractions of the law. His assistance proved a regular windfall to us.

I drew up a plan of restoration, and decoration which was approved by the authorities; then I ordered colours and set to work at once. In order to decorate these gloomy walls it was necessary they should be coated. I surmounted this difficulty by stretching linen over them, and on this surface I represented one by one, the Lord's Supper, The Christ in the Olive Garden, Jesus and the Samaritan, The Ascension, etc.; but I confess that between the paintings of Fra Angelico or the frescoes of Tiepolo, and my feeble efforts there was a striking difference!

I had also made an altar in carved wood. Certainly my different incarnations were now too many to count! It was an immense relief to escape from the horrible monotony of our cell (for now I worked with my workmen as long as the light lasted, shut up in the chapel) and in this way tried to change the current of my thoughts.

Unfortunately things did not go so well with my companions. Their health got worse and worse. Though we managed to satisfy our hunger, we had no really substantial food. We had not known the taste of fresh meat since that delightful lunch at the buffet of Charleville. We

were all painfully thin. Attacks of vertigo and fainting fits attested to our deplorable condition.

Much as we needed food, the sight of our meals filled us with disgust. One of our number now frequently screamed loudly at night, as if suffering from hallucinations, which came between him, and the living world. We were rapidly approaching a great catastrophe, when the chief event of our imprisonment took place. It was during the first days of October—the 7th to be exact—one fine morning, it *was* indeed a fine morning, the *Feldwebel* came to us and said:

"This afternoon a Frenchman will pay you a visit."

"A Frenchman."

We could hardly contain ourselves. A Frenchman here! At liberty to visit us! It was unbelievable!

We plied the *Feldwebel* with questions. He knew nothing, or perhaps, faithful to his trust, he would say nothing further. It can be imagined with what impatience we waited for the afternoon, and this unexpected visit. It was already twilight when, looking out of the window, hankering for news, we perceived in the courtyard a distinguished looking man with a white beard surrounded by several officers.

"Why, it is M. G——!" exclaimed the *Préfet.*

Who was M. G——? The *Préfet* explained, speaking in the most glowing terms of our visitor. It is well known that a number of philanthropists in the United States, anxious to alleviate the misery War brings in her train, had arranged to have food sent regularly to the invaded regions. This generosity of the Americans has proved of inestimable value, and it remains for us one day to repay the debt of gratitude which we owe to citizens of the United States. M. G—— had been deputed by the Relief Commission to undertake the work of distribution. By his tactful management of this difficult mission he rendered immense services.

On seeing our thin faces and our miserable quarters, he could not restrain his tears. He embraced M. Trépont, whom he knew well, and shook hands warmly with us all. It was an affecting moment. Three of the German officers who accompanied M. G—— had tears in their eyes and turned away in order to hide their emotion.

"My poor friends," said M. G——, "you are indeed in a sad state. The Government must at once be told of your condition."

We began to talk. M. G—— told us he had been sent to arrange the exchange of hostages. He would exert himself and try and include us.

The nobility of M. Trépont's character revealed itself fully in the course of this intervew.

" Propose my comrades as hostages," said he to M. G——. " I do not ask for any favours, nor do I wish to put any pressure on the Government to inconvenience them ; they know better than I what to do. Above all, I will never take another's place. Amongst many of these poor prisoners in Germany there are some who might think I was released through influence, and that for lack of it they were left. Take measures for these before me." . . .

M. Trépont's attitude was the more worthy of admiration for the reason that we were very uneasy about his health. It was to his personal interest to profit by this chance of safety which presented itself. Notwithstanding this he thought only of his duty. In France it is the fashion to carp at our Government officials. Let us hope we may have many like the *Préfet du Nord.*

After half an hour's conversation, M. G—— took leave of us, saying that on his return to Paris towards the middle of November, (he had first to visit the northern regions to examine the relief organisations) he would make a point of going at once to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and do his utmost to have us included in the proposed exchange. It was not long before we knew he had kept his promise faithfully. He has our eternal gratitude.

CHAPTER XIII

I MUST here be allowed a slight digression, the usefulness of which will be apparent to all who have friends imprisoned in Germany. I should be greatly to blame did I not give this hint. To all those who send provisions to prisoners, I would advise their adopting the procedure of the Belgian Committees. To the address on the parcel, add always a numbered ticket similar to that sketched below, and which constitutes a receipt to be returned gratuitously.

The advantages of this ticket are evident. First it allows of the sender putting in a claim in case the parcel is lost. The number distinguishes it from previous parcels, and shows the number of parcels already sent by post. It renders the sending of a letter or card to acknowledge receipt unnecessary, and thus does not diminish the number of letters and cards which the rules allow of the prisoners sending.

Shortly after the visit of M. G—— the *Frankfurter Zeitung* published a telegram from the Agence Havas which filled us with hope. It

SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE
Colis N° 32
Expédié le .....

Envoi de : Madame Deloche à Jandeur Ardennes

Monsieur Deloche
National Geiseil
Festung gefängnis Bastion XII
Rastatt in Bade

Envoi de Mme Deloche National Geiseil Festung gefagnis Rastatt

F.M.

Madame Deloche
à Jandeur
Ardennes

Le colis N° 32 m·a été remis le .....

Le Destinataire

A numbered ticket to be attached to parcels sent to prisoners.

said that our Government had decided to reply to the treatment inflicted on the French hostages at Rastatt, by measures equally severe towards German men of position then in France. It was clear that they were aware of our situation and were taking steps to remedy it. We did not know then that on the 19th November M. Albert Taillandier, Deputy of the Pas-de-Calais, had in a written question asked M. Briand, President du Conseil, Minister of Foreign Affairs, whether it was not possible to obtain the repatriation of the ten Frenchmen unlawfully detained under the title of hostages at Rastatt under pretext that the life and security of sixteen Germans arrested in Morocco were threatened.

Some days later the Minister replied officially to the Deputy of the Pas-de-Calais by the following note, which throws a brilliant light on the bad faith of the Germans towards us, and of their unswerving methods of intimidation and blackmail, as it also does on the firmness of our Government.

The German Government informed the French Government by a note transmitted on the 3rd of April last by the United States Embassy, that ten eminent Frenchmen and officials of the invaded countries had been arrested. Further it made known that proceedings were being taken

against these Frenchmen, and it proposed to repatriate them if the Republican Government agreed on its part to send back to Germany all Germans sentenced by the Moroccan Courts, or detained in Morocco under accusations of treason.

The French Government replied that it refused any exchange of this kind, by means of which the Imperial Government could have sent back to it all those among its subjects which it desired to have, while it retained, on the other hand, the power of taking in the occupied departments as many new hostages as it might wish. The French Government added that it could not accept any comparison between the case of Germans prosecuted before the regular Courts, or sentenced by the latter for certain offences, and that of Frenchmen whom the Imperial Government threatened with circumstantial proceedings in order to make them an object of exchange. It finished by saying that if any attempts on the lives of its citizens were made, reprisals would be immediate and severe.

The Imperial Government having at that time interned in Germany ten well-known Frenchmen as hostages, without having made known that any sentence had been pronounced against them, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had several times protested against this unlawful detention.

It recently informed the German authorities through the official channel of the Spanish Embassy in Berlin that, if this situation continued, an equal number of German prisoners would be subjected to treatment of similar severity, and that they would be selected either among the officials and the notables captured in Alsace by our troops, or among those taken prisoner in German Colonial territories now occupied by the French, or finally amongst those interned.

Following this communication, an unofficial intermediary having announced that the German authorities were going to forward, with regard to the ten French hostages, proposals which they believed to be of a nature to satisfy the French Government, the latter provisionally suspended the execution of the reprisals notified by it, pending the receipt of these new proposals of the Imperial Government.

These new proposals of the Imperial Government must be the exchange of hostages. It was high time. Our strength was nearly exhausted. In spite of his indomitable energy M. Trépont was suffering dreadfully. For five days he had taken no food, and we were all exceedingly anxious about him.

On the 7th of December, the Commandant of the fort came to us. He was greatly changed,

almost amiable. He begged us to prepare for departure, for we were to start the next morning for Celle, in Hanover. At first this was a formidable blow. Hanover! Here were we at the gates of Strasburg, and they were sending us into the middle of Germany! It was a strange way of sending us back to France!

"You will be treated much better there than here," said the Commandant, "you will be in a château, the Château of Celle."

This assurance left us cold. They had played the joke of the château on us before! For several minutes I don't know whether we were more indignant or more surprised, but we were calmed a little by hearing that we were to be imprisoned in a camp for French officers. To know that we should see our countrymen was indeed good news. Then, indeed, we should no longer have to submit to the companionship of criminals. In our hearts we pinned our faith on M. G——.

"After all," said one of us, voicing the thoughts of all, "if they send us further away, it is probably to better our condition."

We were given an authorisation which confirmed this impression. For the first time we were allowed to telegraph to our families to give them news of our health and to tell them of our change of residence.

Little by little our good spirits returned. Yes, this change must be the beginning of better things; the bad days were over. The afternoon passed in picturing a brighter future as we packed our portmanteaus.

"And your paintings in the chapel," they asked me.

They were finished. I gave twenty marks to the Commandant begging him to have them photographed and to send me some prints to Celle. The Commandant probably said to himself that such small tips were not in his line. He kept the twenty francs, but never sent me the photos. I willingly make him a present of the money, but it is he who ought to be called "Chipeck."

The next morning at nine o'clock carriages (which of course we paid for) took us to the station at Rastatt. Some soldiers who were to be our guardians during the journey accompanied us, but this time they did not load their rifles in our presence. In addition we travelled second class, and were notified that a corner of the waggon restaurant had been reserved for us. We entered the compartment agreeably surprised. Decidedly there was a great change. The nightmare was passing.

CHAPTER XIV

THE officer who commanded our escort was courteous and anxious to please. Of our journey from Rastatt to Celle there is little to describe. We passed through a manufacturing district, rich in factories. Many of these seemed to us to be working. Around Carlsruhe we noticed rows of a special kind of cannon directed towards the sky. They were waiting our air craft.

It was ten o'clock when we got down from the train at Celle. A soldier was waiting at the station with orders to show the officer the road to the château. This time the château was not a snare and a delusion. A few yards from the station it rose up in the darkness of the night, an immense building of the eighteenth century, with numberless windows. It had not the appearance of a prison. If it was there we were going we had every reason for hope.

It was there. Our hopes became realities from the moment we entered. The *Feldwebel* surprised us agreeably when, after the first few words, he announced that, once our identity recognised, we

should be conducted to *our rooms*. An instant later our surprise turned to joy. Instead of all ten being herded together in a dark and airless dungeon, we were given two large rooms, each with five beds. Real beds. . . . I mean by that beds with a hair mattress, and sheets, sheets! No bars to the windows, no bolts on the doors, no sentinels in the passage. It was paradise!

While Deloche and Coquerel, always devoted helpers, made our beds, and while we gazed out at the distant town, one of our neighbours, an Englishman, knocked at the door. He had come very kindly to bid us welcome.

"I am happy to see that you have been transferred here to Celle. One must be just even to one's adversaries; the truth is that we are quite comfortable here. All is forbidden, but all is allowed. So you see" . . .

He told us in particular that we were allowed to go from room to room, and that as long as we conformed to rules we could walk freely about the enclosed grounds of the château. At last we drew breath freely! That night our dreams were golden.

Interned in the Château of Celle were 220 prisoners, French, English, Russian and Belgian. The greater number were our countrymen. The news soon spread over the château that the ten national hostages had arrived. Everyone came

to see us. The next morning we held a regular reception, and several of us found old friends. M. Motte, the great manufacturer from Roubaix, threw himself into the arms of M. Trépont. Amongst those detained here were engineers from the St. Gobain manufactories, priests from the North, M. de Fourmestrauz, a professor of French in Germany before the War. M. Cormorant, the sympathetic commissioner of Tergnier, M. Maby, M. Mouthon, secretary at the Préfecture of Police. The cries of joy, the hand clasps, the embraces may well be imagined, Many of them, alarmed at the sight of our weakened condition hastened to encourage us.

"You will soon get better here. The air is good and the food eatable."

In the morning the Commandant of the fort asked to see us. He resembled a good old country justice of the peace. What a difference to our gaoler at Rastatt! He was polite, inquired about our needs and assured us that he would do his best to render our captivity agreeable. More, and best of all, he gave us an excellent piece of news. When the *Préfet du Nord* asked in the name of us all for permission to have a few comforts in our rooms, "necessary comforts," as Voltaire has said, he replied, "I hardly think it is worth while, you are not here for long."

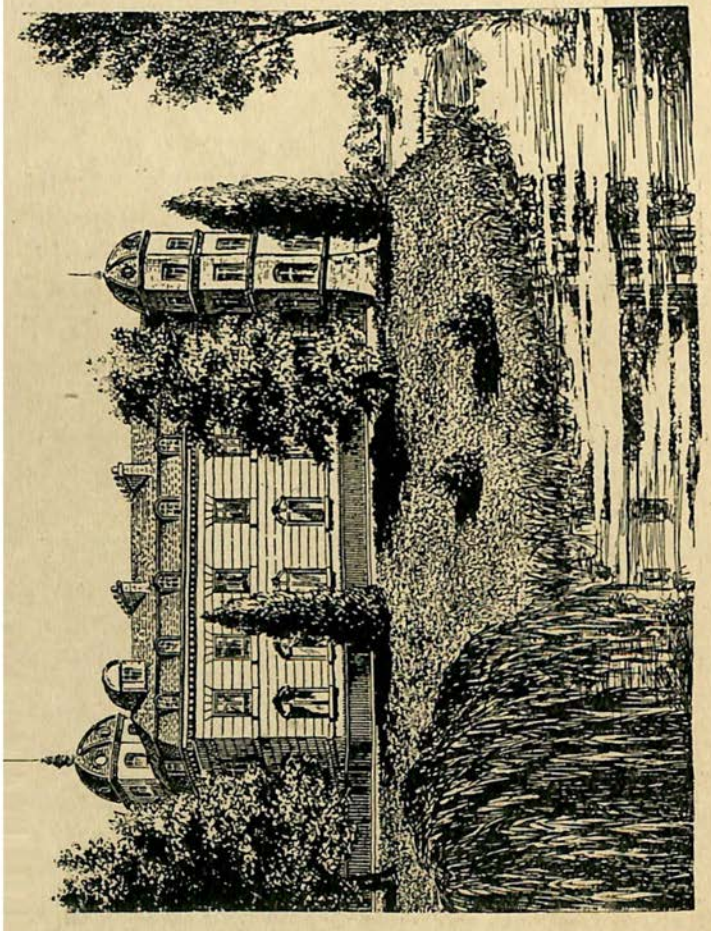
This was indeed pleasant hearing. We judged that the step taken by M. G—— had been successful, and that the next exchange of hostages would result in our joining our families.

Very much pleased, we took leave of the Commandant. Our countrymen, our new friends, were waiting in order to take us round the château and to put us in the way of our new life. They showed us everything and gave us all kinds of advice.

The château, as it is to-day, consists of a huge building flanked by two imposing towers. Some sloping lawns lead to a large lake which surrounds the building. We were allowed to walk on these, and were protected from any temptation to jump into the water by a massive iron railing which bordered it. Nobody in fact had any such desire. After our seclusion at Rastatt, the liberty we enjoyed here appeared absolute independence.

A special table was reserved for us in the huge refectory. A hotel proprietor in the town had taken a contract for feeding the prisoners. He spoke French, and hastened to tell us that we could obtain all such extras as our digestive apparatus needed so badly. We were the better able to agree to his terms as our future appeared *couleur de rose.*

You will realise that, being in such good spirits,



The Château of Celle.

our first repast was an exceedingly gay one. We joked about the excellent appetite of the *Procureur-Général* and M. de Francqueville. We were

also delighted to see M. Trépont eat a little. He was very thin, and his state of health was deplorable. Acting on our advice he began to take nourishment, and fortunately he could drink wine as we all did. That first bottle of Bordeaux! What a delightful recollection it will always remain to us.

Amongst the prisoners was M. Max, the heroic burgomeister of Brussels. His history had reached even us prisoners. His splendid stand and his firm patriotism had filled us with admiration, and knowing him, we loved him.

He was in fairly good health, though still very weak from the cruelties he had endured in different German prisons before coming to Celle. His quiet energy, his bravery, his faith in the future had remained unchanged. He had a room to himself which he had managed to furnish fairly comfortably. He rarely left it, taking his meals there and working nearly all day, only relaxing from this hard labour to take short walks with two officers of high rank, one English and one Russian. He spoke to each in their own tongue, and thus transformed even his moments of recreation into a lesson in foreign languages.

He had in the highest degree that simplicity which gives distinction. His pleasant manner

put even the lowliest at their ease, without in any way diminishing their respect. The generosity of his sentiments, and his high-souled patriotism filled all around him with enthusiasm.

If he spoke of Belgium tears came into his eyes and his voice was heartrending. Those who have heard him say, " My dear Brussels " or " My poor countrymen," and those only, are able to realise the amount of love and suffering a human voice is capable of conveying.

Our only duty was to answer to a non-commissioned officer who daily made the tour of our rooms and counted us. At ten o'clock lights out. Everyone must be in bed.

Assured now of humane treatment, how were we to employ our days? The first few passed in interminable talks with old acquaintances or fresh friends attracted by mutual sympathies. We were told that a small committee had been organised by M. de Fourmestraux in order to study the living languages. Lessons would be exchanged.

" Bravo," cried M. Trépont. " I shall be able to improve my English."

M. de Francqueville and M. de Forceville, who spoke German fluently, decided to perfect themselves in that language. One of our countrymen, M. Souchon, a professor in the Berlitz school,

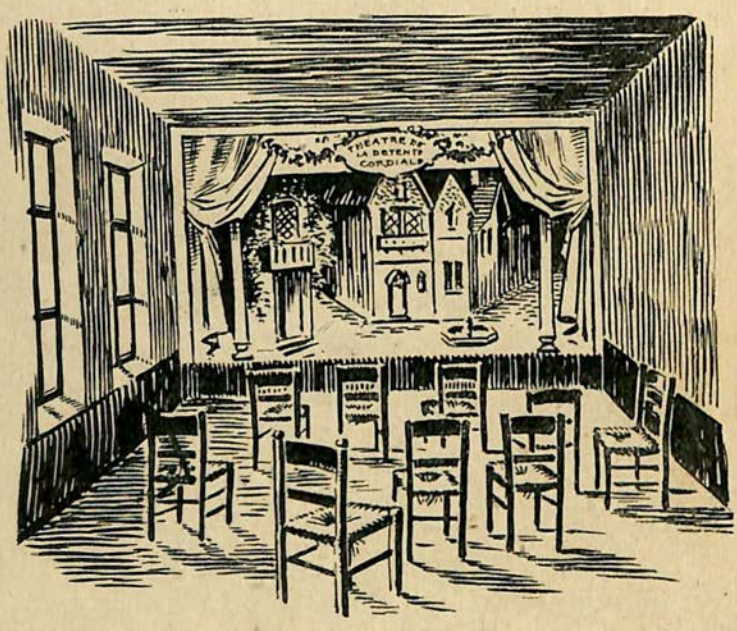
offered to teach us. I myself had no taste for languages. I was asked to enter a recently formed artistic group and I accepted willingly. I joined Prince Nicholas Toumanoff and the pastellist Mittelman, who were preparing an exhibition of paintings; in the château, of course. They asked me to help them. Under their direction I painted three landscapes. Harpignies, Claude Monet, Marthe de Deker will now have me to reckon with!

My love of action drew me to another side. As it has upon all cultivated persons, the theatre wields a powerful spell for prisoners.

With the Commandant's permission the prisoners had already acted several pieces. They were more or less well stage managed. On the Sunday after our arrival the little company of amateurs, self-rehearsed, gave "L'Anglais tel qu'on le parle." This delightful comedy of Tristan Bernard never fails to amuse. M. Motte, the great manufacturer of Roubaix, undertook the *rôle* of interpreter, and there were some very comical results. The *Caissiere* and the little Frenchwoman, both very funny in dresses improvised for the occasion, were represented by two of our companions.

These little performances took place in our great dining room, after it had been cleared of

chairs and tables. There was no scenery. The idea suggested itself to me of making a raised platform to enable all to see comfortably; one



Théâtre de la Detente Cordiale.

that could be put together quickly so as not to interfere with our evening meal.

The little company of actors was very enthusiastic about my idea. I proposed a plan, the money was voted, and we set to work. A real

stage was constructed, on the front of which this suitable inscription was attached.

" Théâtre de la Detente cordiale."

We discovered that a decorator from Brussels was amongst us. He helped me to paint three scenes, an interior, a forest, and what, in stage language, is called a " rustic " and the scenery for the third act of " Cyrano de Bergerac." Yes, indeed ! Nothing less.

We had that balcony covered with trailing ivy, in the shade of which Cyrano addresses to the listening Roxane the impassioned vows which poor Christian would never have imagined :

" Quels mots me direz vous ? "
Tous ceux, tous ceux, tous ceux
Qui me viendront, je vais vous les jeter en touffe
Sans les mettre en bouquet, je vous aime, J'etouffe,
Je t'aime, j'en suis fou. Je n'en peux plus, c'est trop.
Ton nom est dans mon coeur comme dans un grelot,
Et comme tout le temps, Roxane, je frissonne,
Tous le temps le grelot s'agite et le nom sonne ! "

We found the actors. Cyrano was to be represented by M. de Fourmestraux. The Commissioner Cormorant was De Guiches. The difficult *rôle* of Roxane was to be undertaken by the son of a Belgian officer, a very nice boy, beardless, distinguished in appearance and with a graceful figure. He made a capital girl. Several musicians of the orchestra from " La Monnaie,"

also prisoners, made an admirable orchestra. The representation was to be brilliant, and we looked forward to it with great pleasure. But in the Book of Fate it was written that the performance was to take place without us.

CHAPTER XV

IT is when one least expects it that good news always comes. The month of December slipped by quietly and peacefully. We had passed Christmas and New Year's Day with our countrymen. We had been offered the luxury of a midnight mass on the 24th December, and the next morning High Mass was celebrated, with a choir and music, in the large dining-room. I can still remember the powerful and patriotic address given by the Curé (a prisoner also) of Saint Hilaire - les - Cambrai, L'Abbe Herrengt. His eloquence touched our hearts. That night we had permission to sit up till two o'clock in the morning. We had a little midnight revel. Side by side with us the English celebrated Christmas.

The same festivities took place on the evening of the 31st December. At midnight, we went about from room to room, wishing all a Happy New Year, deliverance, and, last but not least, victory. We drank to the triumph of the Allies, the resurrection of right and justice, as well as to the health of our unfortunate countrymen,

who, less happy than we, in dungeons and concentration camps, were still suffering at the cruel hands of Germany. With hearts full of pity we prayed for their liberty and the end of their sufferings.

It was at this moment that the " Goddess with the radiant face," as the poet calls her, knocked at our door. On the 1st January I was putting the last touches to the decorations of our little theatre when Deloche rushed in pale and scared.

" Monsieur Desson, we are to leave, we are to leave."

" What are you talking about ? "

" Yes, yes, we are going away. All our luggage has to be brought down to the court in four hours' time. At ten o'clock we leave the château."

" Where did you hear these reports."

" They are not reports. It is true. The soldier when he brought us our letters just now told me."

I remained sceptical. I could not believe that the formalities for the exchange could have been accomplished so quickly. My companions agreed with me. At lunch we teased Deloche a little about his story. He persisted that he was right.

" You will see, you will see I was right."

We asked indeed for nothing better than to be in the wrong. When a little later the *Feldwebel* came to announce to us officially that we were to

be ready to leave that evening we were filled with a great joy. In the château there was great excitement. What! We were leaving them so soon! How about our course in the living languages? and the theatre and its scenery? And our performance of "Cyrano de Bergerac"? At the thought of liberty these things faded into nothingness. We found, however, that here below there is no such thing as perfect happiness. At the thought of those we were leaving a cloud passed over our sun, and we were almost ashamed of our happiness.

That evening for the last time we took our dinner in the large hall with our companions. Like ourselves they were much moved. We drank healths, and we embraced. Our hearts grew heavier and heavier. In spite of ourselves some of those there (and how could they help it) envied our luck. We comforted and encouraged them.

"Your turn will come! We will not forget you when we get back. Rest assured that we will do our best!"

They accompanied us down to the very railings. There we embraced again, so torn with regrets, pity and affection, that we dared not utter a word for fear of breaking down altogether.

At ten o'clock we took the train, in which we passed the night, and the following evening,

towards eight o'clock, we got out at Singen, close to the Swiss frontier. There we had to wait till the last formalities were completed. Our journey was not marked by any incident, except that at Mannheim, while we were lunching at the Buffet, some of the people present gave vent to hostile demonstrations. The inhabitants of Mannheim have never passed for eagles, even in the eyes of their own countrymen.

At Singen an officer awaited us at the head of a detachment of armed soldiers. Oh! Oh! So we had become very important people. Not at all. The officer, Commandant Von Schippenbach, told us later that, hearing of the arrival of ten "Hostages of Morocco," the people had taken us for *Moroccans!* and he had thought it advisable to take some precautions. Therefore the display of force.

Reassured on seeing our peaceful appearance he showed us a great deal of courtesy.

"In a few days," he said to us, "I shall have the pleasure of conducting you to the Swiss frontier."

"When exactly?"

"I cannot tell you. It depends on your Government. You know that in France formalities always take a very long time. It is what you call, I think, '*Paperasserie*'" (writing mania).

It was quite unnecessary for Von Schippenbach to make this remark. If as good Frenchmen we allowed ourselves an occasional jest at our Government, we did not relish hearing a stranger, an enemy moreover, criticise us. In order to get back at him, we should have liked to say that in Paris all matters of business were conducted at steam pressure, for do they not call them "*affaires courantes.*"

But he did not continue. He was busy arranging for our accommodation. We were lodged in the great hotel of the town, the Hotel Central. I don't give its name to the public with any idea of advertising it, for I do not think after the War we shall be in any hurry to resume cordial relations with our enemy.

On the second floor ten rooms opened on to the passage. To each of us was assigned one. The passage was guarded by a sentry. We took our meals on the ground floor in a private room. The officer conducted us there for lunch and dinner. The meal over, he accompanied us gravely back to our rooms.

He was also ready to go with us on our walks, For an hour every day, in his company, we enjoyed the air in the suburbs of the town, always followed by an armed non-commissioned officer.

We tried to make Von Schippenbach under-

stand how useless this surveillance was. Was it likely that one of us would endanger the imminent liberation of all his comrades by any act of folly.

"I agree with you," said the officer to us, "but I must obey orders. The frontier is only a stone's throw away. You can see from here the sign posts on the neighbouring heights. And, moreover, it is an order. I must obey that above all considerations."

All this was not very important. The only thing which really interested us was our liberation. The hurried departure from Singen had caused us to think we were to return immediately to France. Eight days passed in suspense, and we began to feel very worried. Then ten, then fifteen! When would our papers arrive? The exchange could not have been accepted? Had the Germans thought better of it? As the hours passed we grew more and more anxious. At the end of the third week we were frantic.

On the 17th of January Von Schippenbach arrived with a smiling face. He held a piece of paper in his hand.

"It is fixed for to-morrow, gentlemen," he said, "You will leave at nine o'clock in the morning. I shall have the honour of accompanying you as far as the frontier."

At last! Absorbed in the pleasure of this good news we listened absently whilst he spoke of "a little indispensable formality."

In order to avoid all delay at Gottmingen, the frontier station, our luggage would be examined here, locked and sealed.

At six o'clock came the officials, half policemen, half customs house officers. Insupportable animals! They ransacked our luggage from top to bottom. They took from us the smallest slip of paper, even our personal letters. They even insisted on undressing several of us. M. Trépont in particular was examined with the greatest rigour. But after all, liberty was at hand, and already her radiant face was illuminating our hearts.

Not one of us closed an eye that night, and the next morning we were up and dressed long before the appointed hour.

Our departure passed without incident. At Gottmingen we submitted for the last time to the indignity of being searched. We endured once more the mortification of being touched by German hands. Without even asking permission, they exchanged our gold into German notes at the current value of the mark—which made for the money changers a very pleasant deal, *un bedide obération*. Then giving us into the care

of the Police Commissioner, Commandant Von Schippenbach took leave of us courteously.

At Schaffouse the German police officer found himself somewhat embarrassed. He had probably imagined that in order to receive a German official the Federal Council would have assembled in a body on the platform. When he saw nobody, he was quite disconcerted. The station master took pity on him and gave him the address of the State Judge charged with effecting the exchange and all else which concerned the passage of the hostages to Schaffouse. Some instants later the discharge was handed to the Commissioner who, without saying a word, saluted and turned on his heel.

" Free ! At last ! "

The same cry burst from all of us.

The Judge remarked to us with a smile that we should not be really free till after we had left Geneva, when the German hostages would also have arrived on the German frontier.

" But I can assure you," added he, " that you are meanwhile in perfect safety."

This certainly was enough. We were already drunk with pleasure. Our eyes sparkled and the blood leaped in our veins with impatience and excitement. We felt re-born. To tread a free soil, to breathe a free air, what delight !

When we were told that in order to reach Zurich we must take the railroad to Egilsaü, and for twenty minutes, from Altenburg to Rafs, again be on German soil, we protested unanimously.

"No! no! we refuse."

The *Préfet du Nord* added: "I would rather walk on foot to Zurich."

The Judge reasoned with us gently, and finished by persuading us that if we wished to leave that night for France, we must pass through Egilsaü. M. Beau, the French ambassador, was there to bid us welcome; at Berne our families were awaiting us. It would never do to arrive too late. It was necessary to resign ourselves, and we therefore took the train which passed through Germany. It was an express and did not stop at any of the enemy's stations. The twenty minutes which it took to cover the distance passed quickly. In truth, they were the only minutes of our long stay in Germany which were endurable. We thought of those we were so soon to meet, and our longing hearts overflowed with tenderness.

Of our arrival at Zurich, where M. Beau expressed his joy at seeing us and wished us a happy and speedy return to our families . . . of our encounter with the special correspondent of the *Petit Parisien*, charged with the compliments and

welcome from his journal . . . of the delicious moments at Berne when we perceived on the platform those who had come from France to greet us . . . the reception at Geneva . . . the cries and acclamations which greeted us on our way to Bellegarde . . . the reception given us at Lyon . . . our arrival in Paris, all this may be pictured better than described.

I can never think of it without a feeling of profound gratitude and pride. Those moments more than repaid us for all we had suffered and all that we had had the honour to endure for the glory of our country.

CHAPTER XVI

I HAVE done my best to relate the principal events in my eleven months of captivity, and I have taken pains to keep strictly to the truth and avoid exaggeration of any kind. My great anxiety has been to say nothing which could possibly draw reprisals on those still in German hands.

While my story was being published in the columns of the *Petit Parisien*, a number of friends and readers begged me not to close the narrative without giving them some account of what happened to Madame Desson during my captivity. I have been too much touched by this proof of their interest and sympathy not to accede to their desire.

Neither the suddenness or the brutality of my arrest had weakened my wife's spirit. She is one of those people who do not easily despair. She said to herself simply, "My husband has gone. I will take his place if I can."

She devoted all her energies to the Château de Montrouge, to the sugar factory, exhorting some,

encouraging others, and never for an instant losing, in appearance at least, her *sang froid* and her good temper. Frenchwomen are like that.

How did this attitude affect our enemies? Some days after my transfer to Crépy the officers who were quartered in the château spoke to my wife, and told her that as her husband was no longer there she also must leave.

My wife bravely replied:

"Not at all, I shall remain with my friends."

They answered with assumed friendliness:

"Think well, it is in your interest that we speak."

My wife shrugged her shoulders. One morning the Commandant came to her and announced that I was interned at Fort Hirson, as a hostage for Morocco. Paying no attention to her amazement and indignant protestations he added that the officers of the Imperial Guard having been imprisoned at Riom, where they were dying of hunger (the audacity of such allegations can be appreciated), the Imperial Government had decided to use reprisals.

"As for you," he concluded, "you can no longer remain here. It is useless even thinking of it. I give you your choice between leaving or being arrested. . . . For humane reasons I am anxious, should you leave, to see that you do so under the

best possible conditions. Write an official letter to the Commandant to acquaint him with your desire to return to Paris. Here is a letter which you can copy. Alter nothing in it and I will take care of the rest. Believe me, I speak in your interests, Madame, in your true interests."

To ask a favour of a German suited neither the tastes nor the habits of my wife. She realised however that further resistance was useless. The decision for her removal had gone forth. The Commandant was not likely to forgive certain things she had said, or certain acts, however simple, which might tempt others to follow her example. She also feared, if she insisted on remaining, to bring on our friends at the château new persecutions. It was best perhaps to give in as she would not be allowed to fulfil her mission of friendship and love towards them. But she hoped to leave with the honours of War !

She had been given forty-eight hours to think over her decision. She deferred her reply beyond the time fixed. The officers kept saying :

" Madame, have you written the letter ? . . . Well, how about the letter ? . . ."

To all these questions she replied evasively till the day came, when, on the advice of friends, who began to be uneasy about her, she dictated

her conditions. She would leave, good, but on their guaranteeing that she should have no annoyances on the journey.

The Germans lavished promises : " She would have every attention. She would travel second class and by a direct train. Both her journey and the transport of her luggage would be paid for. An excellent place would be reserved for her in the ' waggon restaurant,' " etc. The Commandant had even the assurance to add :

" I trust, Madame, that once arrived at the frontier your countrymen will continue to treat you as well as we have."

Like many others Madame Desson was not long in discovering what German good faith means. Her letter once written, she resumed her former occupations, and when three weeks passed by without news she began to wonder whether the invaders had changed their minds.

They had not ! One Wednesday morning, the 12th May, after lunch, a motor cyclist arrived in great haste at the Château de Montrouge. He asked to see Madame Desson.

" Madame, you must leave at once. In two hours you must be at Crépy."

" In two hours," replied my wife. " You are are in a hurry ! Besides, I was promised if I left, a *sauf conduit.* Give me first a *sauf conduit.*"

" You will be given one at Crépy."

It was a painful moment. My wife could not bear to leave our friends, and they saw her leave with the greatest regret. Already a *coupé* was before the door of the château. Towards four o'clock, after having embraced those she was leaving, and exchanged with them words of hope and encouragement, my wife entered the *coupé* accompanied by two officers and a policeman. She soon arrived at Crépy and went to headquarters. Her trunks were thrown down in the middle of the courtyard and left there. The inhabitants of Crépy flocked round the court, and she heard their remarks.

" They have taken Madame Desson prisoner. Poor woman, she little knows what awaits her. She will disappear like her husband ! "

At the end of half an hour, the officer in command deigned to remember that a woman was waiting in the courtyard. He had her brought to him.

" You leave to-morrow," he said dryly. " The rest does not concern me."

Happily Madame Desson was able to accept the hospitality of friends who showered attentions on her. She passed the night with them. The next morning at seven o'clock she started for the station, under the escort of a policeman, amidst

the sobs of the little daughter of the house, who cried out loudly :

" Madame Desson, they are taking you to prison ! take care, they are taking you to prison ! "

At the station she was joined by another traveller, a Frenchwoman, Madame D——, who. with her little girl was also being sent away.

The two women introduced themselves to one another, and promised mutual assistance and support on this journey which was beginning so strangely. Madame Desson was refused the promised *sauf conduit* and also any other kind of paper. With her companion she was made to get into a filthy fourth-class compartment. In reply to their objections, the policeman replied in impossible French that he knew nothing. The train left for Laon, where the travellers found at a friend's house a little coffee (all the rest had been requisitioned by the Germans). From there, after paying four francs registration for one trunk, Madame Desson and Madame D—— were sent on to Vervins. They arrived there at four o'clock. At six, having swallowed under the watchful eyes of the policeman a *potage* and *an omelette* in a neighbouring restaurant, they appeared before the *Hauptmann* in command at Vervins. He interrogated them with great rudeness :

" You leave at your own wish, is it not so ? "

" No, indeed," cried my wife.

At this reply, the ill-humour of the *Hauptmann* became accentuated. He rolled his eyes furiously. His whole appearance foreboded such wickedness that even the policeman was impressed. The latter slipped behind Madame Desson, and whispered in her ear,

" Say '*gomme*' him ; '*Pon pour fous*' " (" Say as he does ; it will be better for you ").

My wife spoke :

" I am going to Paris with Madame. At what hour does the train leave ? "

The officer sniggered.

" There is no train. You will go to Gercy."

" What is that ? To Gercy ? "

" You will see ! "

Satisfied that he had personified the true type of the Prussian gentleman, the German went away, banging the door behind him. Indignant and uneasy, the two women and the child, asking themselves what was before them, were conducted to a little town called Gercy, about four kilometres from Vervins.

For some weeks this town had been filled with people who through German tyranny had been turned out of their homes, and who were obliged each morning, to reply to the roll call of their

names, and receive every two days four hundred grammes of bread. The travellers were received with cries and menaces.

" More useless mouths ! Away with you. Our children have already nothing to eat and they bring ladies ! Death to them !

Poor creatures. Despair and famine had reduced them almost to a state of madness ! Madame Desson and her friend were able, however, to find shelter in the Mayor's house. They passed three long and trying days at his house. " What will become of us ? Has my husband been shot ? Is he in prison ? " were questions my wife kept putting to herself anxiously.

At the sight of the misery of his two prisoners the policeman was touched. He endeavoured to comfort them. On Sunday, the 16th, he came joyfully to announce to them that they were to start again. " This time," he assured them, " all will go well. You will first have to return to Vervins." The two women had to get into a train full of refugees. Their police guard's mission ended with their departure. He wished the travellers a pleasant journey and turned away to hide his feelings. If the *Hauptmann* was pitiless, the policeman certainly was a good fellow !

The return to Vervins was made amidst a crowd

of women, children, old men and tramps. A miserable train of refugees, a lamentable troop of human beings who moved sadly and with resignation under the lash of cruel words and threats.

In spite of the flattering promises of special treatment and care, Madame Desson was pushed roughly into a station goods shed. Her companion and the child were treated in the same way. Powerless, they said nothing, feeling perhaps that as it was French people who suffered, they should also suffer with them. Silently they waited their turn to be searched. They were treated like the rest and no consideration was shown them. The odious investigation proceeded. They had to take off their shoes, their stockings. Even the thickness of their shoes was tested. And now an interesting incident took place.

We had owned for several years a magnificent St. Bernard, " Royal," a brave and intelligent creature, who was very much attached to us. At the time of my arrest, I had been very glad to leave this dog with my wife, satisfied that she could not have a more devoted or vigilant guardian. Royal had followed my wife since her departure from Montrouge. He appeared to be conscious of her grief and redoubled his affectionate caresses. He had followed his mistress

during the short journey from Gercy to Vervins, defending her from all suspicious persons. When he saw his mistress being searched he became furious; so great was his rage indeed that Madame Desson had the greatest difficulty in keeping him from leaping at the throats of the frightened soldiers, who did not dare to go near him. One of them, exasperated, threatened to fire at my wife. She was not alarmed, and said calmly :

" Shoot then, if you are a coward ! "

The man hesitated and then lowered his rifle. An officer interfered.

" Oh ! oh ! " he cried, " Frenchwomen are not easily frightened."

Then he gave some orders, and Madame Desson not only received an official authorisation to have the dog with her, and had no further difficulties about him, but was allowed to take him out for a run when they stopped at certain stations. Moral : One must never be afraid of Germans !

The search over, the refugees were crowded pell mell into the cars, where they waited the whole night for the train to start.

This it eventually did at eight o'clock in the morning. A hundred prostitutes were sent with the refugees, and Madame Desson and her friend were forced to listen to their cries, their

songs, their blasphemies and their imprecations. In order to prevent the little girl from hearing all this they stuffed her ears with cotton wool. This is what the Germans called "giving the women every attention."

This homeward journey, in miserable carriages and in such company, lasted five days. By Mezières, Charleville, Longwy, Sedan, Thionville, Metz, the Grand Duchy of Baden passed this convoy of misery and infamy from Vervins to Schaffouse.

What my wife and Madame D—— suffered during those five days and nights may be imagined. Anguish and humiliation seared the hearts of the two exiles. At intervals German officials passed through the train and distributed with gross insolence to the unfortunate crowd, bad soup, undrinkable coffee, and a kind of sandwich made of K.K. bread and sausage ends! My wife and Madame D—— were too exhausted to eat. They only revived when they reached Switzerland, at Schaffouse, where, for the first time since their departure, they realised by the sympathy and kind care given them, and the very air they breathed, that they had indeed escaped from hell!

THE END.

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